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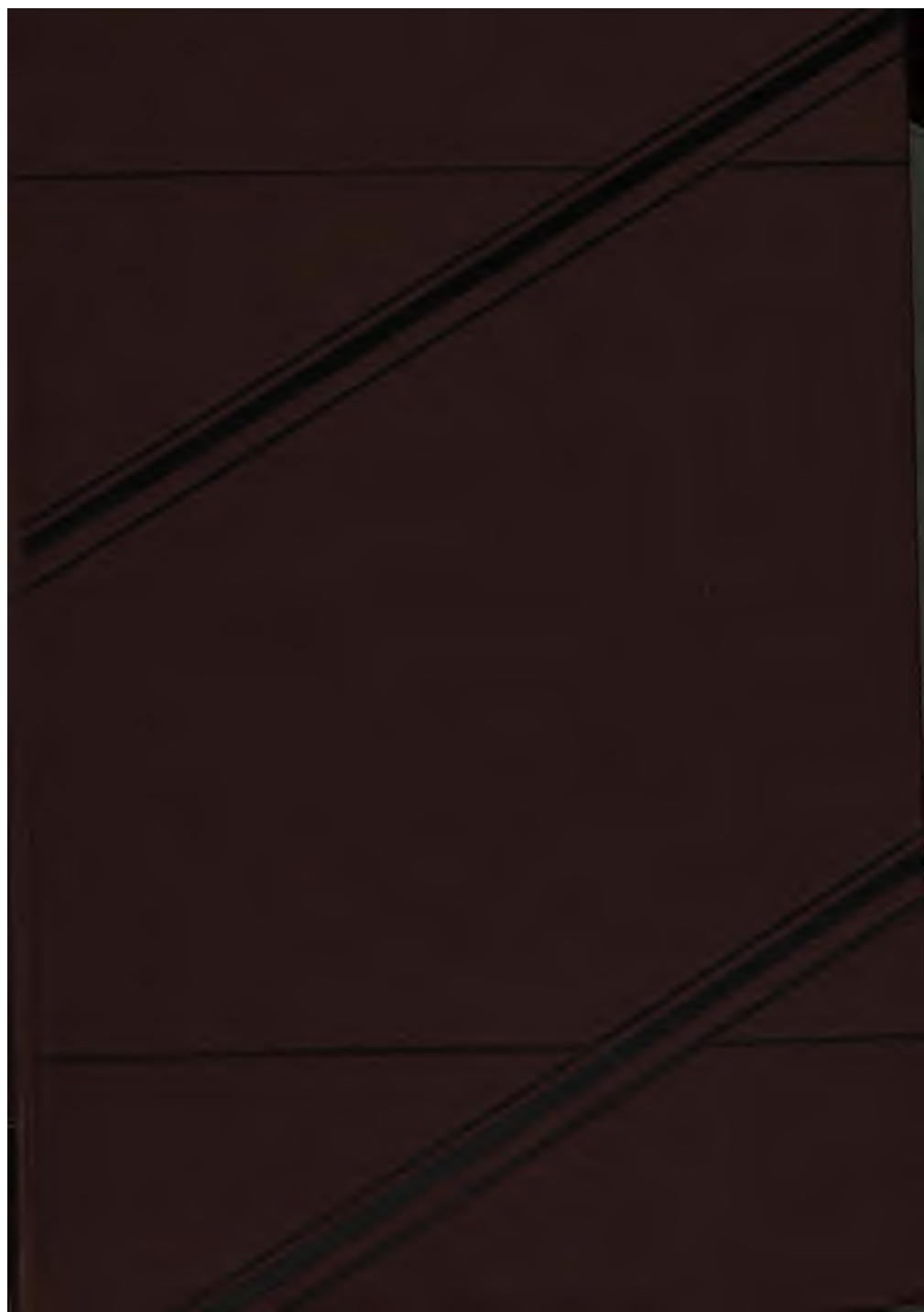
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# EPISODES IN AN OBSCURE LIFE

THREE VOLUMES.—II.



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## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

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	PAGE
I. THE FATHER OF THE STAIRS .. ..	1
II. MR WHITE AND HIS GRANDDAUGHTER	25
III. A BLIND COUPLE AND THEIR YOUNG FRIENDS .. .. .	43
IV. HUGGING BAGS .. .. .	76
V. BANJO AND HIS SISTER .. ..	99
VI. 'MARCH HARE' .. .. .	120
VII. ALONE IN LONDON .. .. .	144
VIII. MR JONES'S FRIEND .. .. .	160
IX. MR JONES'S CUSTOMER .. .. .	192
X. A BLACK MISSIONARY TO THE BLACKS	224
XI. IMAGINATIVE MATTHEY .. .. .	249

7

## I.


### THE FATHER OF THE STAIRS.

BETWEEN two towering piles of gloomy warehouses a dirty narrow alley leads down to Pelican Stairs, so called from the crazy public-house whose bow windows overlook the river hard by. At low water a narrow causeway can be seen at the foot of the stairs, rising out of the steaming mud like the backbone of some monstrous buried skeleton. At the stair-foot, or along the causeway, watermen's wherries are clustered. A boat or two, on their sides, or bottom upwards, lie in the tiny square



which forms the head of the stairs ; and watermen are always lounging there with their hands in their pockets, looking with sullen discontent at the splashing steamers which have almost supplanted the wherry. When I first knew Pelican Stairs, however, one of those constrained loungers was a most cheerfully contented old fellow.

Having occasion to cross to the Surrey side, I turned down Pelican Lane for the purpose of taking a boat. For a wonder, none of the loungers on the stairs saw me until I came out into the little square, and I was able to take in the picture it presented without disturbance. A hale, grey-haired, venerable-looking old man, with a wooden leg, was seated, bareheaded, on a low mooring-post. His right arm was raised, and he was addressing a little congregation of watermen and mudlarks. The mudlarks came up in relays from the slush in which they paddled with their trousers rolled up



to their hips. Whilst they listened, they tried to roll their trousers higher and tighter, and then in a minute or two away they went again. But though the boys grinned, they seemed to like the old man for talking to them; and he appeared to be a favourite also with the saturnine men who stood around him.


As soon as I was seen, the little congregation broke up, and made a rush towards me. If I could have chosen a waterman, I should have selected the wooden-legged one; but no choice was allowed me. I was taken possession of, and somehow hustled into a boat, and it was not until we were a couple of boat's lengths from the stairs that I could ask any questions about the old man. 'Peter Smith is his name, sir,' answered my boatman. 'He's Father of the Stairs now Old Booty is dead. An out-an'-outer Old Booty were —out-an'-out bad, I mean. Peter ain't

like that. Peter the Parson we calls him, becoss he's got a way o' holdin' forth to us, ye see. An' what Peter says ain't bad. We should have ne'er a parson if it wasn't for Peter. The boys, too, likes his yarns about Labridory an' them parts he see when he was abroad. He was 'prenticed to his own father at them wery stairs we've left, but when his time was out Peter ran wild a bit, they say, and went abroad. But he see or heared summut when he were abroad that made a saint on 'im, an' he lost his leg besides, an' so back he come to London, an' he's been a-gittin' his livin' ever since at them wery identical stairs—sich a livin' as them teakittles will let a waterman arn now-a-days.'

My boatman spoke with additional bitterness because just then we were washed by the swell of one steamer, and he had to unship an oar to avoid running foul of another. During the rest of his

pull he had nothing more to tell me about the Father of the Stairs; he was almost too grumpy to give me the old man's address when I stepped out on the stairs at the other side. He did give it to me, however, and a few days afterwards, at an hour when he was likely to be at home, I started to find out Peter.

A great part of the East End of London—notwithstanding its griminess—is very modern. Acre after acre might be cleared of the cheaply-built, dearly-rented hovels with which they are encumbered without doing violence to ‘historical associations.’ But here and there, in the midst of this flimsy modern masonry you come upon a bit of substantial old building. The lane in which Peter Smith lived was one of these old places. A dead dock-wall formed its ‘prospect’ in front and at one end; at the other brawled the bustle and the brutality of an East End river-



side thoroughfare ; but the lane was not a short-cut to anywhere, and so its quiet was almost startling. The old one-storied red brick cottages, with half their room wasted in their unused roofs, their white doorsteps beneath their leaden-painted doors, their leaden-painted square shutters, fastened back from their leaden lattices with bulky wooden buttons, and their eaves-cornice of projecting brick-ends, looked almost as dreamy as a row of country almshouses ; and the tenants, for the most part, were as neat and as quiet as their tenements. I found Peter and his wife sitting over their little fire. ‘Well, this *is* a plasure,’ said Peter. ‘I haven’t had a clergyman, not to speak to, for I can’t tell ye how long, sir.’

‘It ain’t that we wants anything, you’ll please to understand, sir,’ the old lady explained. ‘We has our ups an’ our downs like other folks, but we manage to

get along without being beholden to anybody, thank God. When we can't get what we want, why we just go without till we can—so *that* matter's soon settled. It ain't anything of that, you see, sir, but Peter's a likin' for everything that's good, and goes to church as reg'lar as the bells rings out—an' I go with him when my rheumatiz will let me—an' so it do seem hard that a parson can't drop in now and then to see how we're a-gettin' on when we're a-doin' our best to encourage 'em. Not as I likes parsons that walks into poor folk's houses as if they belonged to 'em, but them as knocks, an' axes after you as if you were a friend like.'

'Well, *this* gen'leman knocked, Esther,' said Peter.

'I'm not a-denyin' of it, Peter,' answered the testy old lady. 'I'm findin' no fault with the gen'leman. P'r'aps he might ha' come to see us a bit sooner, but

no doubt there was others more important, though you do go to church so reg'lar, Peter, an' that's more than ye can say of a good many in this parish.'

With Mrs as well as Mr Peter Smith, however, I soon got on very excellent terms. It would have been a treat to visit them if only because they were not, like so many with whom I came in contact, very little if at all worse off, constantly whining for pecuniary assistance, or fiercely grumbling at not getting it. The old couple, as the old lady had said, had, no doubt, their times of hardship, but it was not so hard as to prevent them from preserving the feeling of independence which gave them honest pride and pleasure. They welcomed my visits because they liked to hear talk about the other world to which they were both fast, although quietly, drifting, and also because they liked to have a friend to gossip with about their

past and present in this world. Long as their lives had been, it was only during two or three years before the married portion of them began that they had been, in any story-telling sense, eventful. But it was very pretty to notice how the mutual affection which had ruffled the course of those two or three years had lasted beyond the term of a 'golden wedding.' Although the old lady was somewhat irritable, she was never out of temper with Peter, and he looked at her wrinkled face as fondly as when, without a wrinkle on it, it blushed under his first kiss. Throughout their married life they had sought the peace of God which passeth understanding—and when wife and husband both sincerely seek that, their home-harmony is almost certain.

And now for the history of those two or three eventful years.

Esther was the daughter of a boat-



builder, sufficiently flourishing to think that a young waterman was no match for his only child. But Esther was of a different opinion. In the last year of Peter's apprenticeship he and she had fallen in love with each other. 'He was a fine young feller then,' the old lady remarked, 'an' everybody 'cept father said we was made for each other. Mother would ha' liked to see me take up with some one that was better off, but she wouldn't ha' had a word to say against Peter if father hadn't set her agin' him.' When Peter was out of his apprenticeship, he wanted Esther to marry him without her parents' consent, but this she steadily refused to do. 'You're young, and I'm younger, and we can wait, Peter,' she said. 'You needn't be afeared as I shall marry anybody else.' 'But I *was* afeared, you see, sir,' Peter told me. 'When her father's got money to give her, a pretty young gal can't be sure who she'll

be forced to marry, and, mayhap, I thought, Esther don't know her own mind, and she'll get tired of waitin' for a poor chap like me—though watermen made a deal more then—shillin's where they take pennies now. I knew nought about religion in them days. As things went then, I s'pose I was looked on as a steadyish young feller. But what I cared about was to get my own way. When I'd set my heart on a thing, I got savage if I was thwarted. So when Esther wouldn't marry me slick off the reel I broke out. I'd been carryin' on at the Pelican one day, and was a sheet or two in the wind, when I got out at the top of the lane. There I met Esther. She looked first as if she couldn't believe her eyes, and then she looked angry, and then as if she was fit to cry. "Peter," says she, "you're shamin' yourself, and you're shamin' me—you'll kill me if you go on this way. Mother told me you

was, but I said it was a lie." "It's your fault," says I. "You marry me right off, and I'll never go inside the Pelican again." Drinkin's bad enough now in these parts, but it was worse then—only Esther's father, don't you see, was a water-drinker, and he'd brought her up to believe—and very proper, too—that a man as got drunk was worse than a beast. "I'd never marry a drunkard, Peter," says she, "not if I loved him ever so, an' there wasn't another man in the whole world. Oh, Peter!" says she, bursting out cryin', "you're goin' the right way to work to keep father from *ever* lettin' me have you." Now you see, sir, I wasn't drunk—I was never really given that way. I could understand well enough all my poor Esther said. But I'd drunk enough to make me feel extra savage, because I *could* understand it all, and couldn't deny there was some reason in it, when I'd been wantin' to think that I was

all in the right, and her all in the wrong. So off I bounced in a fury. "Good evenin', miss," says I. "I wonder you ain't ashamed to stand talkin' to a low feller like me." And back I went to the Pelican. There was a man there I'd been drinkin' with as belonged to a brigantine down at Deptford goin' out to the Labrador fishin'. He'd been wantin' me to go with him; so back I went to say I'd go.'

'Ay, Peter,' interjected Mrs Smith, 'and I went home, and ran up into my bedroom, and cried my eyes out. A nice scoldin' I got when I went down to supper. 'Cept what I'd learnt, or what was in the book, I didn't know much about prayers in them days, sir, but I made up a prayer for him out of my own head that night—that I did, Peter.'

'And God heared it, my old gal,' answered Peter, 'an' changed my heart, and brought me back safe and sound, 'cept for


the leg I'd left behind me. An' that were a mercy, too, when ye come to think on it, 'cos it made me think littler of myself. "The pride of a man is his strength," an' I'd lost a bit o' mine—an' it's wonderful how well I've got on without it. *You* didn't think worse of me, did ye, old gal, when I come hoppin' up to ye like a sparrer?'

'I was sorry for ye, Peter, an' that I won't deny. Legs is a convenience for all parties. But a woman as *is* a woman, and *is* in love, ain't a-goin' to say she ain't because her young man has had a leg took off. Why, sir, I've heard of a ossifer as come back to Harwich from the Penins'lar with *both* his legs and both his *arms* cut off. When he got to his lady's house, he didn't know how to knock, or how to pull the bell, but she was a-lookin' out for him over the winder-blind. As soon as she'd run out and opened the front door, "Good-bye,

Fanny," says he. "I wanted to see you once more, but this is all that's left of me, and, of course, I can't expect a fine young woman like you to take that." But up she caught him, and kissed him like a babby. "You lost 'em fightin' for me and for my country, Fred," says she, "an' I'll have you as long as there's enough left on ye to see." Jest think o' that, sir! An' was I goin' to give up my Peter, as I loved so true, because he'd only lost *one* leg?—an' that partly because I'd angered him, an' poor father wasn't willin' to let him have me when he could ha' kep' me respectable—an' *that* he's al'ays done, thank God, though he *have* only got one leg.'

'Well, yes, sir, I do remember that time well,' said Peter, when I asked him about his Labrador adventures. 'You see it was the only furrin woyage I ever took, an' 'twas then I got my compass—you know what I mean, sir—the compass that's

got the needle that points to heaven, sir. Why only a Sunday or two ago you was talkin' about it, sir; but if you'll not be offended, sir, you haven't azakly the notion of what a ship's compass is like. It ain't like them little toy-things where you can see the needle a-swingin' about and a staggerin' as if it was drunk—the *card* moves about in the ship's compass—so when the skipper sings out, “How's her head, Tom?” you can tell in a moment, you see, sir. Now with them little land things, if you twist round the card at the bottom you can make the needle point Due South, and all manner o' ways, an' that ain't much of a guide—'cept that you're sure that the needle must point to the north, whatever letter's under—though you can't be sure of that nayther with them things. They made me think of the flighty folks that set up to know what's right of themselves. P'r'aps they're right




—p'raps they isn't. Give me the old mariner's compass—and here I've got it,' added Peter, bringing down his brown hand on a canvas-covered, brass-clasped Bible.

'This was give me,' he went on, 'by a mate o' mine aboard that brigantine. Sam Woods was his name, and *Porkypine* was hers—*Porkypine* of the Port o' London. I used to laugh at Sam at first, when I see him readin' of it, an' sayin' his prayers afore he turned in. But when we got into a jam o' ice, Sam was the coolest chap aboard. There was the ice growlin' away like thunder, and us tumblin' over the side to smash a way for her, and I was precious skeared, but Sam worn't. Now, you know, sir, when two men's together, an' one on 'em takes a funk, an' t'other don't, the one that does funk—though he don't like to have to own it—can't help respectin' the t'other




that don't. I dessay I could have licked Sam if it had come to a fight, but that didn't make me feel any braver. "Sam," says I, when the wind had gone down, an' the ice was only snorin' like, "you've been the woyage afore—when are we to get out of this?" "Soon," says he, "please God—there's the fog risin' yonder, an' that means clear water." He was right, sir—the skipper made sail for the fog, an' we got through, an' we got out of the fog, too, into fine clear weather. Sam was a scholar. Says he, when we were talkin' about it, "Peter, there's mysteries over a man's life as well as the sea—but you trust in God an' go up to 'em, an' you'll come out in somethin' better." I couldn't make out what he meant then, but I've a guess now. There was ice all along the shore when we sighted it, but I was glad enough to see land of any sort. We run into a bit of a cove, and it was queer to be able to

take a walk. There was nothin' but ice an' snow to walk on, but still you could stretch your legs, and all of a sudden the snow melted away, an' we got ready for the cod that was comin' as soon as the ice was gone. They catch 'em with the net there, an' prod 'em out ashore with a big kind o' skewer. They hook 'em, too, though, an' bait with caplin. There's lots of fish—salmon, an' mackerel, an' herrin', an' all sorts—on them wild shores, that frown as if they didn't want nobody to come near 'em—dog in the manger like. 'The curin' work ain't nice, an' there's a lot of drinkin', an' after what Esther said to me, I was sick of drinkin' when I come to myself. Still I won't deny that, if I'd had a easier mind, I could have enjoyed myself out there. Besides the fishin', there was birds to shoot, an' bears, an' seals, an' deers, an' wolves, an' foxes, an' porkypines, an' hares, an' beavers, an' all




sort o' animals the ladies here gets their muffs an' tippetts made on—sables an' such. Some of the foxes is blue, an' some on 'em is white. We used to get jolly good feeds off the ducks, an' the snow-birds, an' the porkypines, too. I was in Labrador a bit, and got to know the ways o' the place. How do you think, sir, they find out which way the wind is a-goin' to blow? They hang up a wolf's head, an' which way that points, they say the wind 'ill come. It's whites that do that, an' there's somethin' in it, because the wolf when it's alive al'ays hunts to wind'ard. They're very frightened o' makin' bears angry—both whites and blacks—they think there's a deal of knowingness, like witches, in 'em. They're a queer lot, them Esqueemaws, but the whites—most on 'em's Irish—weren't much wiser in my time. There was missionaries—More-ravy-uns they called 'em, summut like our Ranters, I



guess—an' I've heared that they do good, an' are very quiet little men, though they do give 'em that name; but they weren't in the parts where I was. There was no parson, an' no lawyer, an' no doctor there. Everybody did as he liked, and got well the best way he could. Fortunately there weren't many as fell ill, or turned rusty, 'cept when they'd had too much rum. It's the climate, I s'pose. Fortunately, too, there *was* one doctor handy when I broke my leg in three places. I was out on the ice lookin' for seals, an' I slipped right into one o' their blowin'-holes. Some Esqueemaws pulled me out, an' this doctor—he worn't a doctor then, but a kind o' supercargo of a schooner, but he'd got his tools with him—he had me carried back to the hut I was livin' in, an' there he cut off my leg because he couldn't set it, and looked after me as well as he could, good man. Sam Woods had gone back to the

London river in the *Porkypine*, but he'd talked to me afore he went, an' he'd left me this here Bible, an' told me what I was to read in it; an' I read what he told me, sir, an' at first I was awful skeared, as I lay there in those outlandish parts all alone upon my back. The doctor was a kind gentleman—a very kind gentleman, but he didn't know nought about such things as that. “Keep your pluck up, old boy,” he used to say as he come in, and at first it was very cheery to see him. He came into the dark fishy place like a breath of fresh air an' a blink o' sunlight. But when he'd gone, I got mopish again—thinkin' about my poor Esther here, an' what was to come of me in this world an' the next. All of a sudden, though, I woke out of a beautiful dream about Jesus—shoutin', so that some of my mates run in to see what was up, “Go and sin no more. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,




and thou shalt be saved ;” an’ them’s the two texts I’ve tried to keep in mind ever since, an’ a deal o’ comfort they’ve brought to me, and others, too, I hope. The doctor rigged me out with some kind of a jury-leg, an’ took me on to Newfoundland in his schooner, an’ then got me sent on to London. When I got home, poor Esther’s father and mother was both dead, an’ the old man hadn’t cut up as rich as was expected, an’ she were livin’ with her aunt. But it worn’t none the less kind of her to take up again with a wooden-legged chap like me, an’ come an’ nurse my poor dear mother, an’ then my poor old father. I went back to the Stairs, an’ made a livin’, an’ we were wery happy—an’ we’ve kep’ so, hain’t we, Esther ? Esther had the root o’ the matter in her long afore I had, sir, an’ now Christ’s the comfort both on us clings to. You’d be astonished, too, sir, if you was to see how some o’ them swearin’

mates o' mine an' larkin' young rascals at the Stairs quiets down when you speaks to them, kind but serious, about Jesus. They calls me the Father o' the Stairs, becos I'm the oldest skuller there, and really they behaves accordin'.'

## II.

## MR WHITE AND HIS GRANDDAUGHTER.

I HAVE spoken of the substantial old cottages that may be found here and there in the East End ; the substantial old mansions that may also be found there are still more striking objects, but even more difficult to find, since the once open space in front of them has become covered with cheap brick—their carriage drives, perhaps, converted into arched alleys, swarming with wrangling sluts, and half-naked children dabbling in the dirt with a duck-like fondness. I remember such an old house that was pulled





down a few years ago to make room for a tall pile of bald 'works.' It stood at the bottom of a lane between whose crowded hovels there was just room for a waggon to pass. The only vehicles of any kind that went down the lane were bound for Lockman and Nephew's, and when they got inside the great gates at the bottom of the lane there was plenty of room for them to turn in the pebbled court in front of the old house. It was a mellow-looking old house of red brick and once white stone: grimy, of course, but the grime had a bloom on it like that of a blackened pipe. A semicircular block of some steps led up to the front door. A flat square pent-house projected over the steps; the lintel and the doorposts were richly carved, but smoky dust almost obliterated their cherubs' cheeks and trumpets, vine leaves, and grape clusters. Save that they were low-pitched, most of the rooms were noble chambers,


but they seemed strangely bare of human life and ordinary furniture. 'Lockham and Nephew' — both long before dead and buried, but represented by the nephew's brother, Dingley—dealt wholesale in all kinds of twine and cordage. In balls, in figure-of-8 hanks, in huge coiled lumps like giants' pigtail tobacco, hemp, tarred and untarred, scented and filled the house. In business hours there were often a good many people about the place, but during the evening hours, in which I generally called, it was startlingly noiseless. The old woman, who pretended to sweep and dust the 'office'—once a pantry—and 'did for' the bachelor foreman who resided on the premises, dived into subterranean darkness as soon as she had answered my tug at the pear-shaped bell-pull, and piloted me from the little gate cut out of the big gates—jealously locked again as soon as I had stepped into the yard—into the dimly-

lighted hall of the old house. The foreman was almost always out then. The old man I went to see and myself had the whole of the above-ground premises to ourselves. Sometimes we sat and talked in his scantily furnished room; sometimes we sauntered from floor to floor through groves of cordage that had a weird look in the dusk; sometimes we had our chat in what had once been a garden at the back of the house. Two or three fruit trees were still left in it—black, crooked old things, but still their poor thin old sap was sufficiently stirred by the presence of spring to put out a few white and pink-and-white blossoms, pathetically straggling. A rotten rustic seat and a prostrate dial pillar were the only other signs left to show that the grim, black backyard had ever been green with grass and red with roses. Above its high walls rose higher dead walls. No windows

except those of the lifeless house commanded it. It was a quaintly quiet place to find in a neighbourhood so densely populated. The hum of voices and the roll of traffic came to us there softened as if by long distance. The very patch of sky that we could see at the mouth of our shaft of dead walls seemed isolated. And the old man with whom I talked under those old pear and apple trees was as lonely as his dwelling. The only person in the world who loved him was his little granddaughter, and from her he was separated as he thought for life. She was the only child of his only child, and this son had been obliged to flee the country; having first worried his mother and his wife into their graves, deceived and ruined his father, and deceived and seriously embarrassed his father-in-law. The enraged father-in-law maintained that the father had been in league with his rascally son.

When the penniless old man left the country town in which he had lived from boyhood without disgrace—except that which his son's rascality had reflected on him—he was obliged to leave his little Lily behind him, with the understanding that she was to have no further communication with him. Those were the terms on which the other grandfather took charge of her. The old man came up to London to begin life anew—not hopefully, as the unsophisticated young come, but from the motive that drives the worsted of all ages to London—to hide their distress in a crowd. When the 'nephew' of 'Lockman and Nephew' was quite a boy, the old man had known him and been kind to him. *He* was the only being in all wide London that the old man—whom we will call Mr White—could think of as at all likely to put him in the way of earning the humblest crust in this tragically huge

congeries of most commonplace struggles for daily bread. With very faint hope Mr White went to the city office of the firm, and his heart sank within him when he found that the Mr Dingley into whose presence he was ushered was one who had not at first the slightest recollection of him. Mr Dingley, suspecting imposture, asked searching questions, with short City sharpness, but at last, when he had convinced himself that his visitor had known his brother, he suddenly exclaimed, 'By-the-bye, I do remember hearing John talk sometimes about a Mr White who was very kind to him when he spent his holidays at —. I'm sorry to say I can do very little for you, Mr White. Your age is against you. You must come into the mill young, if you want to get on in London. But I'll do what I can. There's no vacancy in our place, or likely to be, but I'll make inquiries elsewhere. Mind, you



mustn't expect any salary but what it seems like an insult to offer to a man of your years, and standing once—that son of yours must be a precious scamp. Perhaps you'll let me be your banker for a day or two—and, Mr White—lodging runs away with money in London. Excuse my mentioning it, but we've got a little room or two we don't use in our warehouse down by the river. You're welcome to live there rent-free as long as you like. You'll be of use to us, for I've a notion our foreman often leaves the premises unprotected. Wait a bit, and I'll write a line to the housekeeper. . . . There, I've told her to hunt you up some sticks—there must be plenty stowed away somewhere—as many as you'll want, at any rate. And now, good morning, Mr White. Call again on Thursday—perhaps I may have heard of something for you by that time. Excuse my hurrying you, but

time is money in the City. That reminds me—I was to be your banker.’ He forced a couple of sovereigns, together with the note, into the old man’s hand, and showed him out of the inner office. When Mr White called again on the Thursday, it was to receive a note that Mr Dingley had left for him, introducing him to a situation in another firm. The hours were very long, the work was disagreeable, the pay was very small, for an old man; but Mr White felt very grateful to Mr Dingley. It is not everybody who will put himself to trouble to aid an old man simply because he was once kind to a dead brother. Past kindnesses which we have received ourselves are disgracefully apt to grow dim in our recollection, when there is no prospect of more to come from the same quarter. The foreman took a faint liking to Mr White as soon as he found the old man was no spy. The ‘housekeeper’ did all



she could to make him comfortable, because he was so 'civil-spoken,' so anxious to save trouble, and so ready to give any help he could. She soon discovered that the greatest kindness she could show him was—not to inflict her garrulity upon him. 'Pore old gentleman,' she once said to me, 'it's plain to see that he *is* a gentleman, an' 'as 'ad 'eavy sorrers. It makes my 'eart bleed to see 'im slavin' as he do. I'd git up willing to git 'is breakfast for 'im, but he 'on't let me. Them dark, bitter winter mornin's, too, an' 'im as 'as been used to a comfortable 'ome, gittin' 'is breakfast at a coffee-stall! An' then back he comes at night, lookin' as tired as tired, but he al'ays tries to give me a cheery word when I lets 'im in. An' then he goes up-stairs to 'ave 'is tea, an' read a book or the paper, an' to smoke 'is pipe; or if it's fine, he smokes it out in the back-yard, all alone of 'isself, pore dear; but

it's company to me, though he ain't fond o' talk, to know that a nice old gentleman like 'im is on the place, for the foreman don't come 'ome till three or four in the mornin'—horfen.'

I had got to know Mr White through his coming regularly to our church, and as often as I could, which was not very often, I dropped in to have a chat with him in the evening. His loneliness touched me, and the matter-of-course resignation with which he bore his troubles inspired me with sincere respect. He made no martyr of himself—he did not speak about his bowing to the will of God; but it was manifest that he *had* suffered, and that his sufferings had not shaken his trust in God, but rather deepened his love for the divine element incarnated in Christ—the Solacer of the sorrowful, the Saviour of the sinful. Shallow-hearted people sneer at what they call 'the Gushing' in both life and litera-

ture, and unfortunately, in both, 'gushing' is shammed often enough to justify apparently the sneers of those who do not 'gush' for the same reason that a stagnant ditch does not. Natheless, and sharing fully, I hope, the Englishman's *healthy* hatred of 'a scene,' I am not ashamed to confess that I often felt half ready to cry when I heard Mr White talk about his little Lily. She was the only subject on which he ever waxed loquacious. Her precocious demands for definitions definite enough for her scrupulously truth-loving, and delicately though dexterously deceit-detecting, satisfaction; her monkey-tricks; her wondrous old-wife wisdom; the pretty way in which she said her prayers; her general love for all created things—her special affection for the suffering; her more especial love for '*real* grandpapa'—her trying to comfort him when she saw he was in trouble, by trying to make his bed

‘all by herself’ (getting half smothered in the process): these were topics on which the old man was never weary of dilating. But the maternal grandfather, though he had never seemed to care a pin for her before, had claimed little Lily when ‘*real* grandpapa’ came to grief, and knowing that he could then do nothing for the child, Mr White, for the child’s sake, had been obliged to submit with humiliated gratitude to the claim. After he had obtained his poor little employment in London he had several times written to the father of his son’s wife, inquiring after little Lily, and expressing his anxious willingness to take her under his own charge, if the change of guardianship would not injure the child’s prospects; but his first letter had come back to him with no answer except its resealing and redirection; and the others had been returned without even being opened. Poor old Mr White,

I could see, pined for his granddaughter's presence. He loved her dearly, not only for her own sake, but also because she was all the good that had come to him—and *such* a good—from the reprobate only child of whom he had once been almost as fond. Tom couldn't be utterly bad, or he would never have had such a child as little Lily, the old man thought.

One evening when I called at the old house the housekeeper exclaimed rapturously, 'What do you think, sir?—he's got his little girl! She's sittin' with him in the yard—have a look at 'em before you go out—they're a pictur!' That evening I contented myself with looking at them through the hall window; they looked so happy in their reunion that I thought it would be cruel to intrude my company on them. They were sitting under one of the black old apple trees, then sprinkled with green and pink-and-white; and the golden-

haired little girl was pouring out the grey-haired old man's tea for him as gravely as if she had been his own age, whilst he still held one of her hands, as if he must touch her to make sure that he was not dreaming. 'Yesterday mornin',' said the house-keeper, 'Sergeant Rogers come in with her. "Does a Mr White live here?" he axes. "Yes," says the foreman, "but he 'on't be in till night." "Well," says the sergeant, "this little girl says he's her gran'father, an' so I've brought her." An' where do you think he'd found her, sir? He'd looked in the night afore to see what was up at Mother Clam's—that's a lodgin'-'ouse in Tar Barrel Court—an' there with all them dirty drabs o' women squabblin' round her was Miss Lily sayin' her little prayers afore she went to bed. So, when she got up, he axes her what she was doin' there, an' she says that one o' the women had promised to take her to her gran'father.

“Who’s he, an’ where does he live?” axes the sergeant. So she shows him a bit of paper, with “Mr White, Messrs Lockman and Nephew’s, — Lane, — Street,” wrote on it. So he takes her to the station-house for the night, an’ then he brings her here. I ’ad her down in the kitchen till the old gentleman come ’ome, an’ tidied her up a bit—for she’d walked the shoes off her feet. All the way from — that pore little dear had walked. As well as I can make out, she was livin’ with another gran’father as didn’t like this one as she calls her *real* gran’father, an’ wouldn’t tell her nothing about him. An’ they was cross to her there all kind o’ ways, all excep’ a little cousin of hers, an’ him she got to write down what was wrote on that there bit o’ paper, an’ up she come to London with it, sleepin’ in barns an’ on haystacks, an’ that like. Somewheres

about Bow, as well as I can make out, she fell in with the woman that took her to Mother Clam's, an' who knows what might ha' come of her if the sergeant hadn't come across her? You should ha' seen the to-do there was when the old gentleman come 'ome last night. She run out with me when he rung, an' up she jumped, an' hugged him as if she was goin' to throttle him, an' he downright cried for joy, an' I cried too. Out I had to go at once to buy her some new clothes. I do hope there's no law to take her from him. She's cheered him up wonderful, an' she'll be such company for me all day. It's astonishing what wisdom that child has, an' yet she's full o' fun an' as fond as fond can be. It's awful, though, to see how good she is. "Weren't you afraid, my pretty dear," says I, "to sleep out all alone by yourself like that?" "No, nurse," says she—that's the name



she's give me—"no, nurse," she says, "I said my prayers, an' it was nice when I woke in the night to see the stars up above—just like angels watching over me."

## III.

## A BLIND COUPLE AND THEIR YOUNG FRIENDS.

LUTHER's Hymn is a noble tune, but when played quaveringly on a fife, it neither soothes one's feelings nor stimulates sluggish thought. I heard it one Saturday morning so played, when I was in want of both such sedative and such spur. I had a sermon to write, and was not in sermon-writing trim. After choosing and rejecting some dozen texts, I had at last selected one which seemed suggestive; but when I had written it down, it, too, suggested nothing. It was easy to

write a few lines of general introduction that would have done for almost any sermon, but when those were finished, I was once more at a standstill. For some twenty minutes I had been dabbing my pen into the inkstand, as if sentences could be speared like salmon, and feverishly fluttering the virgin pages of my paper, when a shrill fife tremulously struck up the tune I have mentioned, directly under my window. It jarred so on my nerves—more especially because it reminded me of the pulpit for which I was half-hopelessly striving to prepare—that, I am ashamed to say, I lost my temper. I tossed my paper into a drawer, put up my Bible, Prayer-book, and Concordance, and went to the window to intimate to the quavering minstrel that he must move on—although, as I had made up my mind to use an old sermon on the morrow, I had no longer a good excuse for doing so. I felt *very* much

ashamed of myself when I found who the minstrel was. 'He saw a man which was blind from his birth' was the last text I had chosen, and the fife-player was a white-haired blind man. He stood shivering in the muddy roadway, stopping the holes of his fife with fingers so swollen, blue, and numb from cold that it was no wonder his music was made up of 'shakes.' His dog shook, too, as he sat on his haunches on the pavement, with a battered decanter-slide in his black, bluff muzzle, and a half-ludicrous wheedling look in his honest round eyes. When I raised the window, the dog stood up on all fours, and wagged his stump of a tail in anticipation of a contribution to his tray. Before I could drop the coin, however, a tumult arose in a side street, and as the noise came nearer every moment, the dog strained at his cord until his eyes seemed starting from his head, in order to drag

his master on to the footpath ; but before he could do so a runaway horse dashed round the corner, and knocked the old man down. He had been picked up by the time I got into the street, but he was quite stunned. We carried him into the nearest chemist's shop, where he was restored to sensibility, but as his arm was broken, the druggist advised that he should be at once taken to the hospital. Of course, by that time a crowd had gathered in front of the shop, flattening their faces against the window-panes, and trying to force open the bolted door. Accidents have a curious fascination for the lower orders of Londoners. No doubt they pity the sufferers, but still they seem to delight in witnessing their sufferings, and to be very proud if they can do anything that brings them *en rapport* at first-hand with the mishap. As soon as it was known outside that we wanted a cab, a rush

was made to the nearest cab-stand, and in a few minutes four cabs came galloping up—their excited callers sitting and pointing with great importance on the box-seats. Those on the three that did not get the fare had to descend with undignified precipitancy before the drivers' abuse. We put the poor old man into the first that pulled up, his dog leaped in after him, and I went as third passenger to the London Hospital. All the time we were in the shop, the poor dog had been sadly perplexed. He seemed partly persuaded that those who were handling his old master meant kindly, but still he could not make quite sure. Now he would drop his tray, and whine, and try to push his nose into his master's hand; and then again he would give a low growl, snatch up his tray, and plant himself, with firmly-set bandy legs and a menacing wrinkle on his nose, before the chair in which the old man

drooped, as if he wished to let us know that, whilst he had a tooth left, no one should take liberties with his master's person or property. On the way to the hospital he snuggled by his master's side, licking his face and hands, and every now and then giving a literal whimper of sympathy when the old man gave a groan at a worse jolt than usual. The dog eyed me suspiciously when I took my place on the opposite seat, but as soon as he found from his master's tone that my intentions were good, his severe look relaxed, and he apologized for it by giving a wag or two of his brief tail in the rare moments in which his concern for his master would allow him to notice my presence. 'I suppose they won't take in my dog as well as me, sir,' the old man said. 'He's been a good friend to me this seven year, has Billy—the best dog I ever had, and they've all been good. "Is thy servant a

dog that he should do this thing?" the man in the Bible says; but if he'd *been* a dog, he wouldn't never ha' done it. There ain't many men nor women neither can come near dogs for faithfulness.' Another jolt, and groan, and whimper.

'All right, old chap,' the old man went on, patting his dog with his undisabled hand; 'you shall go home and keep the missis company. She'd be lonesomer than ever without you, poor old girl. My poor wife is dark like myself, sir. She goes out most days to earn what she can, but she's at home to-day, laid up with the infleënzey. If I might make so bold, sir, I should take it kindly if you'd give her a call, and tell her where I am, and that I hope to be out again soon, please God. And here's seven-pence-halfpenny I've took this morning—she'll want it. Stevens—Henry Stevens—is my name, and we live in Cook's Alley. You go along the Back Road till you come



to Well Street, and then you turn—but bless ye, Billy will take you. Now you pay attention, Billy. You're to go home presently with this gentleman—to the missis—do you mind? And you behave yourself like a good dog, Billy.'

Billy thumped a tail-tattoo on the cab-cushion and glanced patronizingly across at me as much as to say, 'You needn't be afraid—I'll take care of you, because master bids me.'

'You won't want the string, sir,' the old man added, as he slipped off the dog's collar, 'and it will be cheery like to have something as belonged to poor old Billy when I'm shut in yonder. Now mind you don't go moping, Billy, because of the missis; and you take this gentleman the nearest way you know. Don't you stop at the Chequers, Billy—I'm not a drinkin' man, sir, I thank God, but sometimes I look in there to get a rest and half a pint,

and if I hadn't told the dog, you see, sir, he might have wanted *you* to go in, and that's what a clergyman wouldn't like, I know.'

I was going to ask the old man how he knew that I was a clergyman, but just then the cab gave a lurch that made him clench his teeth in agony, and Billy, forgetting that my character had been vouched for, bared his at me in very ferocious fashion. Soon afterwards we reached the admirable institution which provides for the poorest of London's poor medical and surgical skill equal to what the richest can command, and liberal treatment which is at least on a level with that of any hospital anywhere. When I had handed over the old man to the hospital's care, and promised to execute his commissions, and come to see him as soon as possible, I started for Cook's Alley under the pilotage of Billy, who had lavished canine kisses with nose and tongue on his

master at parting. The dog did really take me the nearest route: turning down beside the hospital in a straight line into the Commercial Road, and then, almost in a straight line, into the Back Road. Every minute or two he looked back to see if I was following, and then, when he found I was, trotted gravely on as before. If I had not followed him, I am inclined to think that he would have taken me into custody. When we reached Cook's Alley, after threading a maze of inosculating courts and lanes, Billy's arrival without his master caused much wonderment amongst the local loungers. But Billy took no notice of them. He merely threw back one more glance at me, and then trotted on to the foot of, and up, a staircase at the bottom of the alley: the loungers following to the landing on which Billy halted, to discover 'what was up.'

They were so dirty and ragged, and

the common staircase was so filthy, that I was quite startled when the door at which Billy scratched and whined was opened. The old blind woman who opened it looked, in spite of her indisposition, 'as neat as a new pin;' both floor and ceiling were clean; the walls were papered with cheap woodcuts; a few flower-pots stood on the window-seat; the window-panes were transparent; the hearth was swept up; there were two or three china ornaments and a little looking-glass on the mantel-shelf; and the furniture, crockery, cooking utensils, &c., although scanty, were all free from dust, and rubbed, washed, and scoured up to look their best and brightest.

When I had told my tidings, and allayed the old woman's anxiety to the best of my ability, I could not help expressing my astonishment at the neatness of her room.

'Oh, sir,' she said, 'if we can't see dirt,

we can feel it. I hate a muddle, and it's a okypation to keep things nice about one. P'r'aps there's a bit of pride in it. Seeing folks, they say, have their places sometimes in a rare mess. But then, again, I like to keep my place tidy, though I can't see it, that them as can may take a pleasure in it when they drop in. So p'r'aps there ain't much harm in being proud of it after all—and my poor husband's just like myself, he can't abear dirt indoors—nor you nayther, can ye, Billy ?'

Stevens, I found, had been born blind, but the wife had lost her sight when about twenty, from an attack of small-pox. 'I was a gay, giddy girl, sir,' she said, 'very vain of my looks and my eyes, and when I came to myself, and couldn't see, and knew I was an object, I almost wished at first that I'd never got better. It didn't seem better to be like that. I was engaged to be married to a young man, but he

never came near me while I was ill, and broke it all off as soon as I got about again. That cut me up dreadful at the time. I felt so lonely, for father and mother had both died of the small-pox, and there didn't seem a soul in the world that cared a penny-piece what became of me. I'm thankful now, though, it all happened as it did, for it was being left like that made me think about religion, and if I'd been a seeing woman I should have married a seeing man, and he wouldn't have been the husband to me that Stevens have been. He *is* a good man, sir, though I say it as shouldn't. He was brought up at an institution, and of an evening he reads the Bible to me. There's one good thing in being blind—you can read without a candle. Yes, sir, we've been very happy, and I pray God He'll spare my poor husband to me. He's the only one in the wide world that belongs to me like.'

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‘Had you ever any children?’

‘One, sir, we had, the year after we were married, but God took her when she was three year old. I didn’t want the neighbours to tell me that she was a sweet pretty child—you’d only to run your hand over her face, and feel the dimples, to know that. Oh, yes, sir, *she* could see, and beautiful eyes she had, and long curls as soft as silk. I can’t tell you, sir, how proud I was of my pretty pet. Seemed as if God had given her to me to make up for making such a fright of me. And we were both so fond of her, and she was so fond of us. She was fond of everybody, pretty dear, and everybody was fond of her. Why, sir, the dog—no, it was long before Billy’s time—jumped up on her bed when he heard the doctor say there was no hope for her, and she died cuddling of him, pretty dear. It did seem hard to have her took away from us that had got so little, and I was wicked

enough to say so. But my husband says to me, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord,"—and yet Stevens was just as much cut up as me, only in a quieter sort of way. Ah, she *was* a miss. It was months before we got used like to her being away. She was always so full of fun, nobody could be dull where she was. The dog got mopish without her to play with, and my old man would sit as still as a mouse in the evening. She used to go and kneel down by him, you see, when I'd put on her little nightgown, and say her little prayers. She could say them right through without anybody telling of her, though she couldn't speak plain. If she'd lived, she'd be getting an old woman now, but it seems as if 'twas only yesterday I heard her saying,

"Dentle Desus, meek an' mile,  
Dook upon a 'tittle chile."

She'll always seem a little girl to me till I




see her a grown-up angel, if God will be so good as to let me. It's strange how I long to *see* her. Now my husband's different. He never knew what sight was, and so he can't understand my feelings about that. To have hold of her, and hear her talk, seemed enough for him, but I was always wondering exactly what she was like. I'd got my notion of her, but I couldn't be sure it was right, and so I felt robbed like—not to know my own child's face for certain. I wonder sometimes which is hardest, not to know how things look, like my poor husband; or to remember how they used to look, like me.'

I encouraged the poor woman to talk, to divert her thoughts as much as possible from her husband's accident. When first told of it, she had wanted to start off at once to go to him. 'Poor dear,' she had said, 'lying there all alone of himself. Billy will take me, and I'd leave him if

they'd promise to give him something to eat. Billy would be a comfort to my poor old man. It's astonishing what a kind heart that dog has—he'd see his master wasn't put upon.'

I persuaded the good woman, however, both for her own sake and her husband's, to wait until the next 'visiting day' before she went to the hospital. When we had been talking for some time, she suddenly exclaimed, 'It seems cruel to be sitting here doing nothing, and him lying yonder. If I mayn't go, will you say a prayer for him, sir?' She sobbed out her amens, but when we rose from our knees she seemed to be comforted. 'Thankee, sir,' she said. 'We've asked God to take care of him, and we can't do better than that, can we, Billy?' She spoke, habitually, to the dog just as if he were 'the Christian' she called him. Billy in response leaped into her lap. 'Now, isn't that



strange?’ said the old woman. ‘He’ll never do that when Stevens is at home, but he wants to say he’s pleased, and ’ll do all he can to cheer me up.’

We had some more chat, in the course of which I learnt the history of this blind couple. The parish on which she was left chargeable started the blind girl as a seller of tape, pins, boot and stay laces, and other such ‘small wares.’ At best the living she thus got was next door to starvation, and her state of health often threw her back again upon the parish’s care. A guardian interested himself to procure her one of the few-shillings pensions that are given to the blind by benevolent persons in London, and at the house of her benefactress, the Countess of C——, the blind girl made the acquaintance of Stevens, a fellow-pensioner. He had been taught basket-making at the institution in which he had been trained, and then was in pretty regular

employ. The two married, and had and lost their little pet. The wife did her best to supplement her husband's wages with 'small-ware' earnings, but had been so often ill that, as she phrased it, 'any other man but Stevens would have got rid of me long ago; instead of a help, I'm a hindrance.' 'He could soon have got another,' she went on. 'A blind man can take his pick of wives, if he'll only beg. There's blind folk, I know, that could be cured if they would, but they won't, because they can make more without their eyes than with them. But my husband was never one of that sort. As long as he could get work at the basket-making he did it, but that's no trade for a blind man now. He can't work against them that have got their eyes, especially when he's getting a bit old and stiff. So Stevens took to playing in the street, but that ain't begging, sir. He gives good music for the money he gets. He won't so

much as say, "Please to pity the poor blind," or have it wrote on a card, as a many do. He's a man of a very independent spirit, is my husband, and yet there's few that thinks so little of theirselves. It'll be dreary to-morrow without him, won't it, Billy? We always go to church twice on Sundays, sir, and Billy goes with us, and lies under the seat as good as gold. And then when we come home, its nice to be able to be together and sit still, instead of tramping about. And Stevens reads the Testament to me, and we sing a hymn or two before we go to bed. Sometimes there's drunken folks that make game on us, but mostly the neighbours stop it. There's few that ain't kind to blind people. An' some o' them as ain't got much to bless theirselves with can cheer up old folks like us just by their company-like. There's the four orphanes as live in the Alley. They comes in now and then an' has a cup o' tea, an'

it's nice to hear 'em. They 're all so fond o' one another. Sunday's always been the best day of the week to me ever since we married. Sitting at home, or sitting in church, heaven seems nearer somehow than it do of a week-day, and it's nice to have my old man with me all day long. I shall feel lost to-morrow without him.'

'You seem very fond of your husband.'

'I *ought* to be, sir. A kinder soul don't breathe. Many a time he's gone without that I mightn't, and nursed me when I was ill just as if he was my mother. And he's as good as a minister to me. It isn't much that he says, but he says it so gentle, and then he behaves according. It was him that first taught me really to believe in my Saviour. I took a religious turn when I lost my sight—most blind folk have a liking that way—but it wasn't till I knew Stevens that I got to understand

what religion was. That's enough to make me fond o' him—let alone his being so kind, and my little girl's father.'

I became much interested in the four little orphans to whom Mrs Stevens had referred, and I shall have something to say of them again; but I may here state what I then gathered of their history from her, and a day or two afterwards from the eldest of them.

This eldest, Phœbe, was not fourteen, but she was quite a mother to her sisters, Harriet and Emma, of eleven and ten, and her little brother, Dick, of nine. They lodged together in a room tenanted by an old woman who kept a 'refuse' fruit-stall in a neighbouring street. Disfigured as her fruit generally was, its colours contrasted queerly with the dusky gloom of the dark cramped attic in which surplus stock was garnered at night, and when the children brought home unsold posies, the

bound, faded flowers seemed to be consciously-pining captives.


Phoebe was a very grave little maiden. Her responsibilities seemed to have crushed all girlish glee out of her. She talked as if she had been past forty, instead of not fourteen. This was the account she gave me, when I wanted to get an idea of the little lonely family's daily life:—'Well, sir, I wakes the children in the mornin', and it's hard work sometimes, when they've been walkin' a good bit the day afore, poor little things. And we says our prayers, and goes to Common Garding. It's mostly flowers we sticks to, but we'll work other things when we can git the chance. That's a good step from here, and horfen we're 'ungry by the time we gits there. There's cawfee and bread and butter you can git, but if you can't git it, why it makes you feel the 'ungrier. No, sir, I can't say that the fruit and the wegetables ever made me



feel 'ungry—you want somethin' warmin'er when you turn out o' your bed at daylight. But it *is* astonishin' who can eat all that lot —wan-loads and wan-loads of 'm — the streets round about is choked with 'em, and the cabbages is piled up like 'ouses. When the rubub's in, you can smell it ever so far off, and there's the water runnin' about on the leaves like sixpences. *Pretty?* I hain't much time to think of what's pretty, sir. I've got to think of what'll pay best. Yes, sir, sometimes I give the little uns a bit of a feed afore I starts 'em, but that's accordin' to what I've got for stock-money. I buy whatever's in. Wi'lets comes in twice a year. Sometimes 'tis wi'lets, and sometimes 'tis primroses, and sometimes 'tis roses, and sometimes 'tis wall-flowers, and stocks, and pansies, and minninet, and lilies o' the walley—some o' the young City gents as fancies theirselves swells are wery fond o' stickin' the lily o' the walley in their

button-'oles. And sometimes it's green lavender. We sells dry lavender too, but that's in the winter when we can't git nothin' else. Fresh things we buys for a penny a bunch at the market, and then we splits 'em up inter two or three, and sells 'em at a penny, or a 'a'penny, accordin' to chances, and sometimes we has to bring 'em 'ome for nothin'. I does my best to freshen 'em up, but they look drunk-like in the mornin'. When we're ready, we start—sometimes this way, sometimes t'other—as far apart as we can. We takes our rounds turn and turn about. Miles we walk—hup 'Averstock 'Ill, and about the swell streets in the West End, and hout to Clapton, and so on, sometimes. No, we never goes across the bridges—I don't know nothin' about them parts. Sometimes we does tidyish in the City, round about by the Bank and the 'Change. But I don't mean 'Arriet shall go there when she gits a bit older. She's

a pretty little gal, and she knows it, and some o' the gals there is a bad lot. I was on the pavement in front o' the 'Change one Saturday arternoon, and I see a gal that was sellin' flowers there three weeks afore, with scarce a shoe to her foot, come along with a velvet bonnet and a silk cloak on; and 'Arriet's fond of dressin' 'erself up. She'll put roses in 'er 'air, when we're a-tyin' 'em up, and I've seed her stop at a water-trough to look at her face in it. But she sha'n't git fine things *that way*—not if I knows it. Mother would be fit to jump out of heaven, if she did. Yes, sir, there's bad amongst flower-gals, but there's good too, and it's 'ard that those as tries to behave theirselves should git a bad name becos o' what the t'others does. It's 'ard work havin' to look arter children. Hemmer's a trouble to me, too, but that's only becos she's so weakly. A quieter, willin'er little gal never was.



But Dick's a trial like 'Arriet. He ain't a bad-meanin' little chap, but big boys gits 'old on 'im, and I'm afeared they'll teach 'im wrong. He's verry ow-dacious. Last winter he went out Christ-masin' with some big chaps. They put him up to git a great bough of misletoe off a tree in an old gen'leman's horchard down by Chingford. But out come the old gen'leman and collared 'im, and away the t'other chaps cut. The old gen'leman was in a hawful rage, for he'd 'ad all his 'olly-trees spiled the night afore. So he up with 'is stick, and was jest agoin' to hide Dick, when he stopped all of a sudding. "No," says he, "it ain't your fault, you shrimp. I wish I could ketch them cowardly mates o' yourn." And he give Dick a penny, but he didn't let 'im take the mistletoe. I wish I could git Dick l'arnt a trade. He'll go wrong, I'm afeared, if he keeps in the streets — and

so 'll 'Arriet. They both minds me now, but when they git to my age, they won't be so teachable. They're a trouble to me, sir—both on 'em. Night and mornin' I prays for 'em, for they're dear, kind children, though they is so flighty. When little Hemmer's bad, they'll work twice as 'ard as they will other times. And it ain't jest for their own bellies—becos there's Hemmer's takin's to make up. It's becos they want to give 'er a bit of a treat; and they'll be so quiet when they come 'ome, it's strange to see 'em—'specially Dick. He's uncommon fond o' Hemmer, and so's Hemmer of 'im. I wish they could be shook up together. Dick 'ud be all the better of her willin'ness, and she'd be all the better of a bit of his sperrit. And yet, though she is so quiet, she takes, mostly, more than any on us. "Pore little thing," a good many people says when they sees her. If all as says it was to buy of her,

Hemmer would soon be sold out ; but it's heasier to pity a party than to 'elp 'em—not that I'm a-complainin'. All things considered, we do uncommon well, thank God.'

The blind man lay in hospital a weary while. The fracture was a serious one, and when the arm was getting better, an almost total prostration of strength supervened. A more patient sufferer I never saw. His only anxiety seemed to be about his wife and Billy. A friend to whom I had mentioned the case agreed to make the old woman a little allowance until her husband should be able to get about again. When I told him of this, his face flushed. 'I'm ashamed of myself,' he said. 'After all that God's done for me, I was beginning to doubt Him. I was worrying myself to think that Charlotte would have to go into the house, and that would have been

the death of her, poor old girl. We've always managed to keep off the parish somehow, and she'd break her heart if she couldn't come to me when the doctors allows it. I ought to have known better. There's the Lamentation the blind folks that go out begging sing. I don't like a man begging when he can do something for his living, just because he's blind; but there's some pretty poetry in the lamentation, sir. I've often said these lines out of it to myself—

‘ But since it is God’s will,  
The more I cannot see the day,  
He’ll be my comfort still ! ’

And I'll go on saying 'em, for He *is* a comfort every way. When I first come to the hospital, I used to have bad dreams, but now they're so nice it's a treat to go to sleep—and what's that but God's goodness? Why it was only last night I dreamt that my little girl, that's dead and

buried years ago, came and sat on my knee, and put her hands round my neck, just as she used to do, and then there was sweet voices all round me like birds singing, but what they sung was all my favourite verses, out of the Psalms and the Testament. And now you've come and brought me this good news, and Charlotte and Billy will be here directly, and I shall be able to enjoy their company. I sha'n't feel as if I was starving them, lying here doing nothing.'

Charlotte and Billy were very regular visitors at the hospital. Billy at first was refused admission, but interest was made for him, and Billy was allowed to patter up the long ward at the end of which his master lay. As soon as he reached his master's bed, Billy would leap upon it, lick the sick man's face, and then, as if conscious that he was on his good behaviour, sit quite still, wistfully watching his



master, but ready to jump down the moment his mistress rose to say good-bye. It was not much that the old people said to one another, but they found a comfort in being together, hand in hand. Just before she took her departure, Charlotte generally brought out some little thing she had managed to buy for her 'old man;' not venturing to produce it sooner, because he had forbidden her to stint herself to get things for him, when he had everything he wanted, and this was the one command of his which she was obstinately determined not to obey.

At last, however, Charlotte and Billy came to the hospital on a more cheerful mission. The old man was discharged, and they had come to convoy him home. Billy, generally a very grave dog, leaped and circled and whined for joy like a young puppy, until, suddenly remembering his responsibilities, he trotted up to

his master to have his collar put on again.

The old people did not belong to my parish, but they came to my church the first Sunday after the old man's discharge. They knelt in the aisle just under me—Billy's bullet-head peeping between his master's feet—when I read out, *An old man and his wife desire to return thanks to Almighty God for His great goodness unto them.*' And in their case the formula was no empty form: they meant the thanks they offered.

## IV.

## HUGGING RAGS.

STREET-TRADING is not the mode of industry I should select for a London child compelled to earn its own living—if only (a mocking condition in hundreds of cases) it could find anything better to do. Street-life is not civilizing. Those bred to it can rarely settle down, when they can get the chance, to what persons accustomed to home and within-walls labour would think far more comfortable callings. Sometimes they become vagabonds in the moral sense, and they are almost sure to become vaga-

bonds in the etymological sense. They like to be free to rove or rest according to their pleasure. They prefer 'chancy' profits to fixed wages; if to-day's take is bad, they comfort themselves with the thought of 'better luck to-morrow.' Permanent shelter, associated with confinement, makes them feel, in their own phrase, 'choked like.' In spite of these nomadic tendencies, however, laziness is not a charge which can be brought against the street-sellers of London. The miles they walk, the hours they stand, the shouts they utter, and often the heavy weights they push or pull or carry, make such an accusation ridiculous. The vast majority of London street-sellers work hard enough for their living, and feel a pride in being beholden to nobody for their keep. Their honesty is not always unimpeachable, but many of them are strictly honest; and when we remember the very high places of

British commerce that are defiled by dirty tricks of trade, we should be chary of casting pharisaic stones at those of the uninstructed, sorely-tempted street-sellers who do try to defraud their customers.

It is our tramp class, whom we too often encourage by miscalled 'charity,' because we like to buy a little reputation for benevolence, from ourselves or others, cheap; because we are too indolent to make inquiries; or because we want to get rid of the bore of having a disagreeable-looking, brimstone-scented object running beside us on the pavement, or whining or bullying at our doors—it is our tramps who, *par excellence* (or the lack of it), form the lazily-dishonest species of the awfully large body slumped under the generic head of the London Poor. A professional thief seems almost respectable in comparison with a tramp. The trained thief has a theory that *alienum* is rightfully *suum*,

and, to carry his theory into practice, he will expose himself to risk, and sometimes work very hard. The tramp's theory of the universe, on the other hand, is this—that he is to be fed and housed without any trouble to himself. He is ready to steal and riot, when he can do so without much danger; for 'a lark' he will even risk his neck; but, as a rule, he thinks that the less he does the more society is bound to support him. Sometimes he will not even take the trouble to beg. I have seen tattered tramps lounging in Regent Street, on a fine day, with as self-possessed an air as any 'swell' upon the pavement. They had slept the night before in a casual ward; another casual ward was waiting for them; they had managed somehow to get a dinner; and so they were amusing themselves by 'looking at the shops.' A poor man who genuinely shrinks from observation because of his tatteredness is

one of the most pity-moving sights that can be seen, but this lazy contentment with rags is loathsomely fearful to behold. It is a pungent satire on the philosophy and religion which make a merit of a man's learning to live on as little as he can—although, when they have the opportunity of gratifying them, tramps are by no means ascetics in any of their appetites.

And yet, despicable as the dirty tramp may seem, sluggishly feeding on society like parasitic vermin, his is a state into which it is far easier for a once self-respecting man to sink and subside than those disposed to despise him might like to believe possible. As a contrast to some of these lives I have recorded, I will give the history of such a man. I fell in with him at the Refuge, and got him to talk pretty freely with me. Now and then he gave a professionally sanctimonious whine, in the hope of propitiating me; when he spoke of

the time when he was in work, he did seem to feel a momentary touch of shame; but a chuckle over his adroitness in making other people provide for him ran through the greater part of his narrative. He could read and write, and, though he interlarded his talk with the 'cadger's cant' he had picked up not only in London, but all over England, he otherwise spoke pretty correctly. His clothing was wretched, and he was very dirty; but there was no trace of famine in his fleshy face and form. He would not give me his real name. 'Figs' was the name, he said, he went by—*why*, he could not, or would not, tell. He had been apprenticed to a carpenter in Maidstone, and, for a year or two after the expiration of his apprenticeship, had earned good wages as a journeyman. 'I used to go to All Saints' of a Sunday—it's a fine old church, and I used to like to see the soldiers of a morning.



They've cavalry soldiers of all sorts at the barracks, big and little, red and blue ; and they used to make a pretty sight marching in and out, and clanking their spurs and their sabres when they got up and down at prayers. I was always fond of variety. Sometimes I'd go in the afternoon. There's a travellers' house on the left-hand side as you come up from the bridge. When I've seen the tramps and the hoppers hanging about there of a Sunday afternoon, and the church-going folks looking at them half-frightened, I little thought I should ever be one of them ; but I've had some jolly larks in that house since.'

Work became slack in Maidstone, and after spending almost all his savings in search of it in his native town, the carpenter started on foot for London. 'Leastways I footed it to Gravesend, meaning to take the boat there. I'd got a bundle of my clothes, and my tool basket, and a shill-

ing or two. When I was going up Bluebell Hill, close by Kit's Coty House, that, no doubt, you've heard of, sir, I felt very down-hearted. You can see Aylesford from the hill, and there was a girl there that I was sweet upon—but that wasn't to be. A good thing for her, and for me too, I think, now. And yet if I'd got work when I came to London, I might have been different. I tried my best, so *I'm* not to blame, sir. I went to every carpenters' house of call I could hear of, but it was no good. No, sir, I didn't drink then, and it isn't much that I take now. I may break out now and then, but I ain't a lusington, praise the Lord. I don't see the sense of it—it ain't seeing life when you've got three parts stupid before the fun begins. Anyhow, I got rid of my clothes, and then I got rid of my tools—and *then* what was I to do?'

When he had just money enough left to

pay for a bed, he went into a lodging-house in Keate Street, or Thrawl Street—I forget which—and there he matriculated in mendicancy. ‘I’m used to such places now, and so long as you’re warm and got your grub, where’s the sense of making a fuss about a bit of dirt? But I was different then. I’d been used to having things decent about me till I came to London; and the place smelt so bad, and there was such goings on at night, that I wished myself out of it. I was getting a warm at the fire in the morning, and wondering what I was to do for a breakfast, when a chap came up to fill his pot, and says he, ‘What’s your lay?’ I didn’t know what he meant, and, of course, he could see that I was green. “Come along,” says he, “and have a feed—me and my pals will stand it, though you do look as if you’d got a good twist of your own.”’

The invitation to breakfast was ac-

cepted, and before it was over the carpenter found himself enlisted by a band of 'lurkers'—sham workmen out of work. He *was* one, and looked the character they personated so tellingly that they eagerly availed themselves of his want to snap him up as the show-member of their company. 'I was shame-faced at first, sir—I didn't like the thought of begging—but what was I to do? I wasn't going to starve, if I knew it; and when I found how the money came tumbling in, I began to think that folks must be flats to work when they could get a deal more by not working. Ain't it reasonable, sir, for a poor man to think like that? He may work all day, and only get as much in a week as a swell will spend in a minute. It's only fair that the swells should give some of their tin to us, instead of spending it all on their greedy selves. And if they won't give it without asking, it's only doing

them a kindness to ask 'em. If your story ain't true exactly of yourself, it's true of somebody they ought to give to, but they wouldn't.'

'Figs,' like a great many other people who have no genuine fear and love of God, had previously been kept honest simply because those with whom he mingled thought it 'respectable' to be honest. Mixed up with another set who thought it 'spoony' to be honest, he rapidly adopted their views. 'I've seen a deal of life, sir—that I have, *in fact*. There ain't many so fly to a good bit of all sorts as folks in my line. Bless you, we read the papers, and it makes us laugh, it does, when they pity our ignorance. We could put the editors up to a wrinkle or two, I guess. I should like to get one of them into a padding-ken, without a bobby to look after him. He'd be as helpless as a child—indeed, there's plenty of children that know

a deal more of what real life is than editors. And the bobbies ain't half so knowing as the papers make them out to be. I could show them up, if I chose; but, of course, it wouldn't pay. A deal of life I've seen, and a deal more I've shammed to see. I've been all sorts of trades, and blown-up stokers, and shipwrecked mariners, with a picture of the wreck, and full particulars for them that cared to ask for 'em, and some will, but mostly it's old women it's easy to gammon. Most of my limbs I've lost down coalpits and elsewhere. I've been a wounded soldier discharged without a pension, and appealing to an indignant, sympathizing country to right its stingy, ungrateful government's wrong. And I've been a shivery-shaky, the man who couldn't get warm, as the song says; but I never took much to that, because you see, sir, it *must* be pretty cold when you go out to shiver. I've been all

sorts of things, and have cultivated the compassion of my countrymen extensively. Where's the harm? Ain't that what you parsons try to do, sir? You should get *me* to preach a charity sermon for you—just as I am.'

The cynical candour of the man's confessions astounded me, but he explained their candour with equal cynicism. 'Why, you see, sir, I soon found out that I couldn't bleed *you*. You haven't much blood to lose, I guess, and though you don't know half as much about such as me as you fancy, at any rate, you have got to know us when you see us, and you've learnt at last not to trust us—and so I thought, just to take a rise out of you, I'd make you open your eyes with a bit of Gospel truth. You'll excuse my saying it, I hope, but you've a soft look, and I don't think you'd have the heart to turn me out of here to-night even if you'd got the power, which,

I believe, you haven't, so long as I obey regulations and don't make a row; and, power or no power, you'd have to send for the police—and that wouldn't look pretty in the papers, would it, sir?—there'd be leaders about the homeless wanderer kicked out by the folks that call themselves charitable—lamentable to state, at the instigation of a clergyman—into the bitter inclemency of the wintry elements. I shan't trouble you after to-night, sir. Your accommodation ain't to my taste, nor your grub either, and I was fool enough to think I'd get a good feed, and so I didn't bring anything in. You've *done* me, sir. I owe you one, I own.'

I suppose I ought to be ashamed to say so, but I could scarcely suppress a smile at the fellow's impudent out-spokenness. Of course, he instantly noticed the twitching of my lips, and went on in high good-humour:—'You're not bad in London.



Where there's such a sight of folks, there must be a sight of flats. But the yokels are better. If you can't butter 'em, you can bounce 'em. The farmers, big as they are, are very timorous. They'll give a cadger, if he's only a bit cheeky, and the farm's a bit lonely, a tanner, and sometimes a bob, to get him to move on when the day's drawing in; and *how* they'll watch you down the lanes—shamming not to, all the while! They're afraid their ricks will be fired, or their throats cut at night. I've slept in many a barn, for all their looking-out. It's a good game to go up to the back door of a farm-house, when all the men folk are out. The maids look as if they'd drop through the floor when you poke your head in, and "However did he get past the dog?" you'll hear the mistress say; but we know a trick or two besides that. And then the *scrán* you get in the country—not round near London,

but when you go north'ard. It ain't dry crusts and cold fat, such as they give away in London, and think themselves very charitable for getting rid of what they can't eat; but real good stuff that it's a pleasure to eat—ham, and pies, and such like—and what you can't eat you can sell with a good conscience at the ken. And rare larks you can have at some of them country kens. Quiet little places they may be in—you'd think three parts of the folks went to bed as soon as they'd had their supper, and then lay trembling for fear the country beaks should wake 'em up to say they've some fault to find with them; but we've nice games, notwithstanding, in them quiet little cribs with "Accommodation for 'Travellers" up over them, as steady-looking as if the travellers were Methody travelling preachers.'

To make the man feel ashamed of himself, I asked him how he had felt the first

time he visited Maidstone as a beggar. 'Well, sir, I won't deny that I felt *queer*—afraid like, somehow, that I should meet myself—what used to be myself, I mean—but I can't explain silly nonsense. Of course, I met lots of people I knew, but they didn't know me, and if they had, they wouldn't have been' likely to claim my acquaintance. A cadger is better off than a king—if he wants to travel incog., *he* can. But it *did* make me uncomfortable that first time I was in Maidstone. I saw the house where I was born, and the school I went to, and the shop I worked at, and the woman's where I lodged, and they all looked so decent, that I half wished I'd never gone away. But this was the cuttingest thing—at the houses we use, they mostly put you up to the best walks to take in turn. Well, the day after I got to Maidstone, I was up pretty early. We mostly are. We ain't early to bed, but

we're early to rise, and that's what makes us so healthy, wealthy, and wise. Well, when I got to Allington, I thought I'd sit down on the grass by the old castle, and have a pipe there before I went to business. Who do you think came by, sir, whilst I was sitting there? The very girl I courted at Aylesford. I knew her, but she didn't know me. When I was going to speak to her, back she ran, screeching "John, John," and up came her husband, a big quarryman, looking as black as thunder. I'd half a mind to tell him I knew his wife before he did, but then there's no use in making mischief when you can't get anything out of it; and so I said, as mild as milk, "I'm sorry I frightened the lady—I was only going to ask her for a copper to help a poor traveller, that's been sleeping under a hayrick, to a breakfast." And she gave me a penny with her own hand, and look'd right at me, sir, and yet she didn't

know me—so, you see, sir, she hadn't broken her heart about me.'

Fancying that he was softening, I asked 'Figs' whether his brazen talk was not all bravado—whether he had not often felt ashamed of the unmanly line of life he had adopted. 'Can't say I have, sir. Well—yes, I did *once* feel downright ashamed of myself. It was at Chelmsford. The Three Queens I was stopping at, and I was going along the London Road when an old lady looked over her garden gate. There's some tidyish little houses along the London Road. "Poor man," says the old lady, "you look very hungry, and as if you'd like a job." "Yes, ma'am," says I, "I *am* very hungry, and I *should* like a job." "Well, then," says she, "come in, my poor man, and I'll give you some breakfast, and then I'll give you a job." And a jolly good breakfast she gave me in her kitchen—coffee with cream in it, and as much as

I liked to have of buttered toast. I'd had a good feed before I started, and so it was hard work to eat all that the old lady wanted me to—but she liked me all the better for being so modest. She kept the servant girl toasting for me till her face was as red as a brick, and “Don't spare the butter, Jane,” says she, “it ain't often this poor man can get a meal.” I'd hard work to keep from bursting out laughing, but I didn't. When she'd let me give over at last, she took me down to a bit of grass in her garden, and says she, “Now, my good man, I want you to roll this for an hour, and I'll give you a shilling—that's more than you've had for a week, I suppose?” (My opinions were different, but that wasn't the time to express 'em.) “I'm sure you'll roll it well—you've such an honest face.” “Thankee, ma'am,” says I, “I hope I have. A man *may* be honest, though he *is* poor.” “Of course he can,”

says she. "I hope you don't think I wanted to wound your feelings, my poor man. I'm going down into the town for an hour, and when I come back, you'll have finished, and I'll pay you." I clutched hold of the handle of the roller, and set to as if I was going to work like a steam-engine, but before the old lady was in-doors, I was down with my back against a tree, having a pipe. I was up again at the roller, though, by the time I thought she'd have got her bonnet and shawl on. She was a neat old body, of a Quaker kind of cut, and I guessed she'd be a pretty good bit about it. But, bless you, *she* never looked at me when she came out—she was so sure that I was honest. I was up again by the time I thought she'd be back. She was a bit late, and so I had to trundle that confounded old roller pretty brisk for five minutes or so. Up she came running like a partridge, but I didn't take any notice of her

till she was right on me. "Oh," says she, out of breath, "my poor man, I'm so sorry I've kept you waiting. And you've done it so nicely—how hard you must have been working, with your feeble frame!" Blessed if she didn't give me a bull, and advise me to put half of it into the savings' bank. Yes, I *did* feel a bit ashamed when I took it—I hadn't earned it anyway. I hadn't had to set my wits against hers. She'd done my business for me. The innocence of the poor old silly was downright touching.'

I have made a chapter of these cadger-confessions just now, because in the winter month in which I have been turning over my diary to prepare my present Episodes, frightful destitution once more prevails, and is likely for some time to prevail, in the East End. Wanting every penny we can get for our genuine poor, I am more than ever anxious to warn the charitably-



disposed against the sham poor. Let all who have money or goods to give for the relief of their suffering fellow-countrymen, make it a religious duty to ascertain, either by personal inquiry amongst the poor, or by a strict eye kept over the agency they may select as their almoner, that their gifts really go to those who are really in want of them. Otherwise they may merely manure our already rankly rampant mendicancy, and rob the very people they wish to serve. It is a sin, and not a virtue, to scatter money for what schoolboys call a 'scramble' in a distressed district. In the pauper parish, as in the playground, the sturdiest beggars, under such circumstances, are sure to appropriate the bulk of the indiscriminate donation.

## V.

## BANJO AND HIS SISTER.

THACKERAY makes one of his characters say, 'What a master—nay, destroyer—of the affections want is !' There is truth in this. It would be ridiculous to pretend that poverty does not often breed in a family a gross, grasping selfishness which makes the poverty still more ghastly. But if this is, perhaps, the rule, there are noble and numerous exceptions to it. In the present and the following chapter, I will give two of the many that have fallen under my own notice.

The street Ethiopian serenader is not, I fear, generally speaking, a very estimable character. He has taken to his peculiar calling, as a rule, because he hates work, and likes a vagabond life, coupled with chances of drink. There are times, no doubt, in which he makes more than he could have got from his previous employment, when he has been a working man of any kind; but there are often also times in which he makes a good deal less than he might have got if he had stuck heartily to work. It is the beery Bohemianism of his peripatetic profession which attracts him. The street Ethiopian serenader of whom I am about to write was in some respects not much better than the majority of his brethren; but he had a genuine love for a sick sister—a love which manifested itself in self-denial for her sake.

I made my acquaintance with him thus.

I was visiting a sick parishioner in a quiet side-street, when a company of serenaders—then more novel than they are now—accompanied by a noisy crowd, came and struck up an air, with a tumultuous vocal and instrumental chorus, under the very window of the invalid. They seemed to have selected their stand because they had seen the window-blind drawn down. The poor young fellow I was visiting—the only son of a respectable widow in straitened circumstances—had been just dropping off to sleep when the vile din of cracked tenor, bull-like bass, idiotic ‘Yah, yah, yah,’ scraped fiddle, thumped tambourine, tortured concertina, twanged banjo, and clattering bones began; but the noise instantly brought him back to his former state of tossing unrest. His mother gave her little maid a penny, and bade her give it to the men, and bid them go away, because there was some

one ill in the house. The only result of this mission, however, was an outburst of choral confusion worse confounded; and, therefore, I went out to see what I could do. 'Bones,' half-drunk and very impudent, made himself the spokesman of the company. He rattled his bones in my face, and said that if Englishmen *did* do the niggers, they *wasn't* niggers to be druv away by anybody, when they was earnin' a honest livin'. They'd a right to play in the Queen's highway, and play they would, if they wasn't paid for goin'. If folks *was* ill, they wasn't to stop *them*, unless they paid accordin'. Give 'em a bob, and they'd go then.

'Very well, then,' I said: 'I shall go for a policeman.'

'Don't you wish you may get him?' retorted the bibulous Bones—

"Go away, go away," says the shabby-genteel;

"Go away, go away," says *he*;

“He’s too much of a scurf to give us a bob,  
But he’ll bring, *if he can*, a bob-bee.”

Now then, boys, go on with the consort.’

But Banjo refused to join in. ‘You shut up, Bones,’ he cried. ‘The gentleman spoke civil enough to you; and if there’s anybody ill in there, it’s a jolly shame to keep ’em awake with our row.’

Tambourine, Fiddle, and Concertina, who were going to follow Bones’s lead, looked half ashamed when Banjo spoke up in this way, and the company took their departure: Bones stopping at the corner of the street to clatter his bones once more, and give me a Parthian shot in the shape of a ‘yah—yah—YAH’ of profoundly contemptuous disgust.

Shortly afterwards I met Banjo in his white hat, exaggerated shirt collar, and absurd dress-coat, walking along by himself, with his instrument under his arm. He was shaking himself as if all his bones

were out of joint, rolling his eyes, and baring his teeth, as if he were chewing the cud of most rollickingly facetious fancy, mincing as if the ground were not good enough for him to tread on, and yet hurrying as if a crowded opera-house were impatiently waiting for his appearance. But when I spoke to him—to thank him for his backing—he instantly dropped his professional manner. ‘It *was* a shame, sir,’ he said; ‘but then Simpson was half slewed—he was sewn up before we got home that night. *I* know what illness is. I’ve got a sick sister at home. Religion ain’t much in my line, but I know it when I see it, and a real downright religious gal she is, and no mistake. If you could give a look in now and then, sir, it would be a real kindness to the poor dear gal. There she lies all day without a soul to speak to. I’m out all day, and when I’m in, I haven’t

the knack of talkin' about the things she'd like to hear about. I'm not a hypocrite, sir, —that I *can* say of myself—but really I've felt as if I should like to sham pious, if I only knew how, to please that poor gal. Though it wouldn't be no good after all. When anybody's the real thing themselves, it's easy for 'em to spot them as isn't, however hard they may sham. But if you'll call now and then to see my poor sister, sir, you'll do her a real kindness, and though I ain't in the religious line myself, I shall be very grateful to you, sir. No. 17, Bertha Street, three-pair back, is where we live. Good-mornin' to ye, sir, and thank ye, sir.'

A minute afterwards Banjo had resumed his consequentially-comic look and dislocated gait, but as I watched him careering along the street, escorted by an ever-growing crowd of widely-grinning



youngsters, I could not help feeling a kind of respect for the kind-hearted, black-faced buffoon.

I paid my first visit to 'No. 17, Bertha Street, three-pair back,' pretty early in the morning, in the hope of being able to see Banjo as well as his sister. I was just in time to have a word with him. No answer being given when I knocked at the door of the three-pair back, I opened it and walked into a very scantily-furnished chamber. One side was curtained off with sacking. This rough curtain was lifted, and I saw Banjo in professional costume stooping down to kiss a poor pinched girl who lay on a low bed within, before he went out to his professional labours for the day. 'I'm glad you've come, sir—I said you would,' was his remark when he looked round. 'Nance, this is the clergyman I was telling you about. Come inside, sir—wait a bit, I'll get you a chair. What was chairs

made for but to be sat upon? And we've got two, hain't we, Nance? so there's a choice. This un, though, has got a bit of the bottom out, so you shall have the one I'm keeping for Nance when she gets up to make my breakfast the week after next. There, sir, sit ye down, and talk away, and thank ye, sir. Good-bye, old gal, I'm off now—I shan't be late. Good-mornin', sir, and thank ye, sir.'

So speaking, he cocked his white hat still more on one side, and stalked sprawlingly to the door, strumming on his banjo. He turned round to give his poor sister a good-bye grin, which had a great deal of love in it, then made us both a very low, mock-reverential bow, and softly closed the door after him. The poor girl had smiled faintly at her brother's antics, and reflected with interest his look of love.

'A kind-hearted fellow your brother seems to be,' I said to her.

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‘*That* he is, sir,’ she answered eagerly. ‘A better brother never breathed. There ain’t many brothers that would burden themselves with a poor helpless thing like me.’

‘Have you been long an invalid?’

‘Going on for four year I’ve been here now, and instead of getting tired of me, he’s almost kinder to me than he was when I first come.’

‘I suppose he makes a good deal of money?’

‘Yes, sir, sometimes he may make a tidyish bit, but then most men wouldn’t think it was enough to divide between two; and sometimes it’s very little indeed he gets. Much or little, however, he will make me take what I want, however he’s off himself. And he don’t sit moping as if he was making a martyr of himself, but seems merriest, I think, when he’s worst


off. Of course, he does that to cheer me up.'

'You must be very lonely here by yourself?'

'Not so very, for Tom makes me keep a bird—here he is by the bed—though the seed comes to more than he can well afford in hard times. But he says I want a companion, and a dear little chap Dick is. Tom puts the cage by the bed before he goes out, so that I can get at it, and when I open the door, Dick 'll hop out and light on my head, and then he'll fly about the room, and then he'll fly back and perch on the cage, and sing as if he'd burst himself.'

'It is astonishing how much cheerfulness one of these little mites can throw round one.'

'Yes; and how wise Dick is! As soon as he sees that I want to go to sleep, he's as mum as a mouse. He's a fond little



chap—he nestles up to me like a child. But he's twice as fond of Tom as he is of me. Rare games they'll have when Tom comes home. Dick maybe's been moping, but he brightens up as soon as he hears Tom's step, and hops away to hide. "Tweet, tweet," he says, for all the world like a child crying "Whoop," and then there's a hunt and a chase, and when Tom's penned Dick up in a corner, he'll ruffle up his feathers and make believe to bite him, and then he'll hop on his shoulder, and walk up his fingers like a ladder, and let Tom balance him on the top of a stick, and swing in Tom's handkerchief just like a child. Him and Tom have whistling matches—Tom's a very pretty whistler. Yes, sir, Dick certainly is a great amusement to me, and a real beauty he is, when his ash-coloured tail feathers is out. He's a Belgian—Tom gave five shillings for him. He's been moulting lately, but you can see

the grey tail-feathers just sprouting like out of the gold.'

The poor girl, who was suffering from incurable spinal complaint, seemed as if she could never weary of talking of her brother. 'And when flowers is in, Tom's pretty sure to bring me a bunch of some sort. He's very free with his money—twopence he'll give for a *chameleon*—them red and white waxy flowers like roses, with the glossy green leaves. I'd rather have a penny bunch of vi'lets, because the smell of them puts me in mind of old times.'

'You were not always in London then?'

'No, we was bred in the country, and when we used to go picking vi'lets, we didn't think we should ever be living together in smoky London. But what should I do without Tom, now, sir? They couldn't do me any good in the hospital where I went, and I should have had to be sent to

the workhouse, if Tom hadn't taken me. He would have me. We was always from children very fond of each other, and it was partly because Tom was in London that I came up from the country and took a place here. I was afraid that he was getting a bit wild, and thought that, perhaps, I might do him a bit of good. But there you see, sir, God has so ordered it that it's Tom that takes care of me, poor dear boy.'

'What part of the country do you come from?'

'Burnham Market in Norfolk, sir. There's ever so many Burnhams about there—one of them where the great Lord Nelson was born—but it's a very sleepy part of the country, except when the gentlemen are out with their dogs and their guns. You can hear the turnips growing down there, is a saying. So it's no wonder a high-spirited lad like Tom should want

to see a little more life. So up he came to London, and got a porter's place, and I wish he'd stuck to it, poor fellow. But he'd a good voice, and was always fond of fun and company, and those nigger singers began to go about, and he fell in with those he's with, and joined 'em. That was before I came to live with him. I wish he'd some other line of life, poor boy. It exposes him to a deal of temptation in the way of drink—not that he often comes home the worse for it, and when he does he never says a cross word to me, but just goes to bed quiet, as if he was ashamed of himself.'

'But he would not have to be ashamed of himself, if—'

'That's true, sir, but he's such a dear, kind brother I can't bear to say anything against him. And then, you know, sir, he's got into a way of making a joke of everything, and when I want to speak serious to him, he tries to put me off with



something funny. I don't find fault with his spirits, poor boy—they're often a comfort to me. Jokes are very good things in their way, but there's a many things you don't like to hear joked about.'

'Very true; life is too serious to be only laughed at—this life and the one to come.'

'Anyhow, I don't feel much inclined to laugh when I lie awake at night, and hear the church clocks chime the quarters and strike the hours for four or five hours at a stretch.'

'Does Tom ever sing to you?'

'Some of the songs he have to sing seem downright silly to me—he don't sing 'em at home now, because he knows they vex me. It don't seem a life worthy of a man to go about singing such stuff.'

'Those who give money to hear them are as much to blame.'

'But some of the sentimental songs, as

he calls 'em, are very pretty. I like to hear *them*. There's "Mary Blane," and "Lucy Neal," and "Ben Bolt," too, I like, though the young woman it's about, as was always weeping with delight when you gave her a smile and trembling through fear at your frown, couldn't have been a comfortable party to live with, I should say.'

'No; I think not.'

'There's another about somebody sitting by the river and weeping all the day. The tune's very pretty, but I don't hold with so much crying, no more than I do with laughing always.'

'One can't help crying sometimes, but we must learn to bear what God has thought fit to send upon us—crying over it all day long won't do any good to any one.'

'But Tom's a dear good fellow, and of a Sunday night he'll sing me the Evening Hymn, and he can chant "I will arise and

go unto my Father" beautiful. That *do* make me cry—if he only meant what he was sayin', poor fellow! And he'll always read the Bible to me when my eyes are tired, though he don't seem to care for it as I should like to see him.'

After a pause, she added, anxiously: 'I hope you don't think, sir, that I'm finding fault with Tom. I should be an ungrateful wretch if I did. It's just because I'm so fond of him that I can't help grieving to see that he don't care about the things that give me my comfort. Kind as he is, what should I do lying here, if I couldn't trust in God and hope to meet my blessed Saviour in heaven?'

'It must be very solemn to lie all alone, and hear the noise outside that you have no share in.'

'I wouldn't care if I could but see my poor Tom setting his face Zionward. I could then say, "Now, Lord, lettest thou

thy servant depart in peace"—though it would be a sore trial to part from him, and I do believe he'd fret for me, trouble as I am to him.'

'He doesn't seem to think anything a trouble that he can do for you.'

'No, no. Last thing at night he comes to tuck me in, and put my orange handy for me, and if he hears me moaning in the night, he's up to see what he can do. I can't help moaning sometimes when I fancy he's asleep—it seems to let a little bit of the pain out. And then in the morning he lights the fire, and gets my breakfast for me, and puts my Bible, and the bird, and everything else I want handy before he goes out.'

'But does no one else come to attend you?'

'Oh yes, he pays a woman down below to cook me a bit of dinner, and get my tea for me. Sometimes, perhaps, he don't

come home quite as soon as he might at night, but that ain't to be wondered at. I'm sure I shouldn't grudge him a bit of pleasure, poor fellow, if I wasn't afraid it was doing him harm. And often he do come home as soon as ever he's knocked off singing, and do all he can to 'liven me up.'

'I hope he does not leave you alone on Sunday.'

'It ain't often that he does, and when I've got him that's my nicest day. He's quieter then, specially in the evening, and sometimes he'll let me talk to him a bit. When you're without company all the week, it's a real treat to have your own brother with you all day Sunday—and then he's so kind and handy in his ways—no woman can beat him at cooking or at nursing either. Often I want him to go to church, but he says, "No, if I go out, I

shan't go to church—so I had better stop where I am, Nance.” So I’ve to quiet my conscience with that, and I’m afraid I’m too ready, because it’s so nice to have Tom at home.’

## VI.

## 'MARCH HARE.'

ONE day when I was going out of my house, I almost ran against an old woman who had come up to ring the bell—meanwhile dolefully chanting 'Hare-skins—rabbit-skins?' A skin or two dangled from her arm, and they were the only warm-looking wraps she had about her. In spite of great coat, comforter, muffetees, and cork-soles, the bleak east wind had nipped me when I opened the front door, but this poor old creature was shivering in a cotton gown that had lost all 'body' and

definable colour from long wear and many washings, and a shawl so threadbare that the wind must have rushed through it like water through a net. She stooped as if she found the burden of life too heavy for her, and had the half stern, half stolid look which a lifetime of cloud, scarcely ever broken by the merest glimpse of light, generally gives to those unto whom such days and nights are appointed.

'Any hare-skins or rabbit-skins?' she repeated with mechanical monotony when I made my appearance. 'Oh! I thought you had brought me a hare,' I said by way of joke, pointing to the hare-skin dangling from her arm. 'I'm too busy to shoot hares, even if I had the chance, and I'm too poor to buy hares—and no one ever sends me any.' Instead of smiling at my very mild facetiousness, the old woman instantly turned away and went along the street, raising from time to time her dreary




chant. Time was too precious to her to be wasted in idle chat with one who offered such poor chances of his ever being available for the extension of her business.

As the bent, miserably-poor old woman went down the straight, cold, grim street with the hare-skin hanging over her arm, the brambled woodlands in which the hare had frolicked, the grassy lanes along which it had scampered, the green corn it had nibbled in the dewy moonlight, were scarcely more difficult to realize than the comfortable dinner-table at which, most probably, it had been eaten. It was through having been led to think of the contrasts between the surroundings of the hare and those of the old woman who would make her little profit out of the sale of its skin, that I chanced to take particular notice of her; and so was able to recognize her when I met her a week or two afterwards. She was turning into a little paved

court, a pinched oblong, with an opening that was a mere slit between the houses of the street on which it gave. Its own little houses were two-floored, but a tall man standing on tiptoe could almost have looked into their upper windows. If the doors of the two rows of hovels that stared into each other's faces with lack-lustre eyes had opened outwards, they would nearly have met. At the bottom of the court rose a high dead wall. Nevertheless, this *cul de sac* was used as a drying-ground, damp, dusky sheets, shirts, &c., hanging thickly from the lines stretched across it. Beneath the dripping clothes ragged children were sprawling and squabbling on the filthy flags, and in a corner at the bottom of the court half-a-dozen lads were playing at pitch and toss.

A man stood watching them : a man of thirty, with scraps of paper pinned here and there, for ornament, upon his ragged



clothes, and a roll of paper, torn at the end into a rough imitation of a plume, stuck into the band of his hat, the semi-detached crown of which stood up over his shaggy hair like the lid of an opened preserved-meat tin. 'There's mammy, March Hare,' cried one of the lads, and the poor idiot came capering up to the poor old hare-skin collector. Each seemed delighted to see the other. The old woman's sternly sombre face broke out into a fond mother's smile as she greeted her poor prancing son, but 'March Hare's' face soon clouded. 'Lollies, mammy, lollies,' he wheedled, holding out his hand like a monkey's paw. When his mother told him that she had not been able to bring him any lollies, he put his finger in his mouth, and sulked. 'Lollies to-morrer, perhaps, Tommy,' said the old woman. 'Come in with mammy now, like a good boy.' 'No, s'an't,' lisped poor Tommy, stamping his foot like a spoilt

child. She persuaded him to go in with her, however, and they disappeared in the entry of one of the houses.

I had not time to make inquiries about them then, but one evening when I had a little leisure I went to the house. The little children squatted on the doorstep maintained a solemn silence when I asked them in which room the old woman who sold hare-skins lived. They did not budge an inch to enable me to pass through their serried ranks; so I had to make a long stride over their matted heads. Then one of them condescended to say, 'Up-stairs—right afore ye,' and, at this remark, although I was puzzled to discover the point of the joke, the whole company of infantry grinned and chuckled. The door they had pointed out stood open, and when I looked into the little room, I saw the poor grown-up baby seated on his mother's knee, sucking a bit of sugar-stick, at the same time

pouting his sticky lips, in baby style, for the kisses which his poor old mother was giving him. 'He's not himself, poor boy, and so you see, sir, I humour him,' she said. 'Run out now, Tommy, and play like a good boy, becos me and the gentleman wants to have a talk.'

'Got any lollies?' said Tommy, getting off his mother's knee, and sidling up to me. 'Tommy likes lollies.' He looked so disappointed when he found I had none, that I gave him a penny to buy some, and then he departed in high glee. My young friends of the doorstep had been peeping into the room, and rushed down before him, shouting—

'The swell's guv March Hare a penny, and he's a-goin' to spend it!'

'*He* won't get much out o' that, won't poor Tommy, thank you all the same, sir,' said the old woman. 'He's uncommon fond o' sweeties; but he'll give 'em all away

to the little uns, if they axes him, and they takes advantage of him.'

'Do they tease him?'

'No, sir; neither them nor the other folks about here as knows him : they're all kind to him in their way, and 'ill take his part, if they sees strangers puttin' on him. But then poor Tommy goes roamin', and gits 'unted by bad boys elsevheres. He'll come 'ome kivered with muck, and cryin' as if 'is 'eart 'ood break. Ah, sir, it's a sore trial to a mother to see a fine 'andsome chap like him runnin' up to her jest as if he was a baby—and him all she's got in the world, poor feller.'

I had not noticed poor Tommy's good looks; but then I had not his mother's eyes to look at him with. As delicately as I could, I asked why he was called March Hare.

'Well, you see, sir, it's partly along o' my sellin' the skins, and partly becos he

ain't quite right. "As mad as a March hare," you know, they says—the hares goes mad in March, I'm told—all on 'em. Though if they isn't madder than my poor boy, they'll do no harm. It's astonishin', sir, what sense he have sometimes: he ain't half as silly as he seems. It's only his funny ways as makes folks think he is. God's give him sich a 'appy 'eart, that he can't 'elp caperin' about at what seems queer times to most folk; but Tommy's a sight more brains, hid away like, than many as laughs at him. He fair frightens me the way he talks sometimes—jest as if he was a-talkin' wi' angels. He *see* a angel down by the lamp-post, outside the court, and if *that's* bein' silly, I wish I was silly, too; for I don't see no angels, and it 'ud be a change to sich as me.'

'And to a good many more, I suspect.'

'Well, the kindness of that poor boy you wouldn't believe. I tries to keep about

for both our sakes; but now and then I gits laid up, and to see the way my poor Tom 'angs about me, and does what he can, poor dear, 'ud surprise you, sir. I pray God I may keep him as long as I can do for him; but when I've been a-lyin' 'ere, not knowing but what I might be gone afore to-morrer, I've prayed as God 'ud take my poor Tommy afore me; for there 'ud be nobody as could understand him when I was gone. They'd shut Tommy up, and that he never could abide.'

'Can he do anything to help you?'

'I've no doubt he could, sir, and he'd be willing enough, poor boy, but then you see folks has a prejudice agin flighty ways in the way o' business, and besides, Tommy's so kind-hearted, he'd be sure to git took in. But what he can he does. He'll have the kittle bilin' for me when he don't 'appen to forgit it, poor boy, and he'll tidy



up the place accordin' to his notions—it ain't ezackly my way, but then he looks jest as if I'd scolded him if I puts the things straight, and so when poor Tom's been a-tidyin' I lets the things be till he's out o' the way agin.'

'I suppose he never goes far from home?'

'Oh, he'll go out into the country and bring me 'ome great boughs o' May, and bundles o' buttercups and blue-bells that you couldn't grapse in your two hands, sir. The room's like a bower spring time and summer. But Tommy can't abear to see the flowers a-witherin'. He'll pull 'em down in a rage like, but he don't chuck 'em into the court. He makes a great 'eap o' them, and carts 'em back into the country next time he goes for more. He's got a fancy that they'll git better if he takes 'em 'ome—that's what Tommy calls it.'

'Do you ever go into the country with him?'

'No, sir, I've enough walkin' about in the town. All day long I'm at it, and sometimes I don't git a single individual skin. It's years since I was as far as the Forest—not since I was married.'

'Did you ever see a hare running then?'

'No, sir, I never see a live hare and never tasted a dead un. Some o' the neighbours goes to the Forest sometimes in a wan, but I hain't no money to spend on wans, and if I had, my poor Tommy 'oodn't go. You couldn't git him into a wan—no, sir, not if you offered him ten thousand golden guineas, nor not if it was to save his life.'

'How is that?'

'I was in the family-way with him when his poor father was killed by one o' them lumberin' brewers' drays—had his 'ead smashed as you'd scrunch a black

beetle, sir—and that's what upset poor Tommy's mind. Bad boys tries to pull him up to a wan, or a cart, or anything that's got wheels, sometimes, and tells him he must git in, jest to tease him. But it ain't a safe game to play. It drives my poor Tommy downright wild. He'll howl so as it's awful to 'ear 'im, and bite and kick and do anything he can to git away. Ah, that was the beginnin' of my troubles! My husband was a steady young man, and we was very fond o' one another, and we 'adn't been married a year. P'r'aps he might ha' got tired on me, and cross to me like other men, if he'd lived, but I don't believe he 'ood, anyhow he hadn't the chance. My poor Tommy was born in the workus, but, please God, he shan't die there—no, nor the workus shan't bury him, if I can 'elp it.'

'Has he lived with you ever since he was born?'

'Yes, sir, when I came out of the workus, I brought Tommy with me, and we hain't been parted since. He was sich a comfort to me when he was quite a little un—not but what he's a comfort to me now—I'd never part with him; but that was different. I used to thank God so as he was a boy, and not a gal. The men al'ays gits the best of it in this world, however 'tis in the next. I thought he'd grow up a steady tradesman like his father, and then I should have some un to lean on agin.'

'And you were never married again?'

'P'r'aps I might ha' got married agin if I'd wanted—anyhow, I wasn't axed, and I didn't want neither. "I'll look arter my boy," I used to say to myself, "and he'll be a comfort to me." The neighbours as see the child used to say that he didn't take notice and behave like other babies; but I thought that was jest envy becos he

was sich a much finer child than theirs. "He *ain't* like other children," I'd tell 'em back, boastin' like, "as you'll find when he grows up." It was a long, long time afore I'd let myself believe that he *was* different from other children in another kind o' way, but I was forced at last, and a sore trial it were to me.'


'But God fits the back to the burden.'

'I know that, sir, and if it wasn't for fearin' as I might die afore him, and leave him with nobody to care for him, I could almost be glad that my poor Tom is as he is. If he'd had all his right senses, he mightn't ha' loved his mother as he do now that he's got nobody else to hold to. He'd ha' had a wife and little uns of his own, and p'r'aps he'd ha' thought nothin' o' me. He's a real comfort to me, sir, though you mightn't think it. He's so foud o' me. Though he's sich a great big chap, his heart haven't growed like out of

knowledge. He'll snuggle up to me and stroke my face, jest as he would when I 'ad him at the breast.'

On my asking her as to the kind of living she made she went on,—

'Me and my poor Tom has been pretty nigh starvin' sometimes, but, thank God, we've got through the hard times somehow, as the sparrers does, and there never was a cross word betwixt us. And, as I was a-sayin', Tom ain't half as silly as folks make him out to be. It 'ud be long afore a good many o' them 'ud say the improvin' things my poor Tom do at times. He'll be talkin' all kinds o' stuff that I can't make neither head nor tail of, and then, all of a sudden, he'll look round sharp like a bird and say somethin' jest like a bit out o' the Bible. It was only last week he'd been goin' on with his games, though I couldn't 'elp cryin', for I'd done uncommon bad, and how I was



to pay my rent I didn't know. Well, sir, poor Tommy see me, and up he come, and says he, "No cry, no cry. Laugh like Tommy." "Ah, my poor boy," says I, "I wish I could." "God loves merry folk," says Tom. Well, sir, that set me a-thinkin', as Tom's sayin's often does. Anyhow, if I couldn't be merry, I thought I wouldn't be mopish. It seemed a sin like, and my poor boy so cheerful. So I shook myself up, and things looked a deal brighter. If you believe in God, it do seem a sin to go about as if you was at a funeral—there ain't much faith in that—though it's uncommon 'ard for sich as me to cheer up sometimes.'

When I heard this poor old woman inculcating the duty of Christian cheerfulness, I could not help thinking of the heads always bowing like a bulrush, the faces never relaxing into a smile, that I had seen in 'Christian homes' crammed with

all kinds of comfort. The repellent effect which such visages must have upon the young has often been pointed out, but we are too apt to look upon persistent dolefulness of this kind as merely an unfortunate weakness, whereas it is really, as the old woman called it, a sin.\*

In reply to further inquiries about her calling, the old woman said:—

‘Well, sir, my trade ain’t like a good many—it’s briskest in winter. There’s more skins to be picked up then, and they’re better. God gives the poor things more hair in the winter to keep ’em warm. I’ve sometimes wished my gown ’ud grow thick like that, but then, arter a man-

\* On this point I may quote a pregnant little paragraph from Mrs Jameson:—‘Dante placed in his lowest hell those who in life were melancholy and repining without a cause, thus profaning and darkening God’s blessed sunshine; and in some of the ancient Christian systems of virtues and vices, melancholy is unholy and a vice; cheerfulness is holy and a virtue. Lord Bacon also makes one of the characteristics of moral health and goodness to consist in “a constant quick sense of felicity, and a noble satisfaction.”’



ner o' speakin', it *is* somehow that way with me, becos I can do best when the weather's cold. But then the coals runs away with the money—so p'r'aps it don't make much difference—and you want to eat more when the weather's sharp. Poor Tommy's appetite is good, and it goes agin my heart to stint him—I'd far rather go without myself—but sometimes I'm forced to. My earnin's ain't much to keep two people on: 2*d.*, and sometimes more, I've to give for a skin, and then I only git a ha'penny by it.'

'Where do you go to church?'


'I don't go to church nor to chapel—not reg'lar chapel—neither. I haven't got fit clothes, nor Tommy hasn't, and they wouldn't let him run about at a reg'lar place o' worship as they does where we goes.'

I found that a good, simple-hearted man, a genuine Christian, though he *was* a

'Christian unattached,' had hired for Sunday services a room in the neighbourhood, used as a dancing-room during the week. Here he had gathered together a little flock of human strays, to whom he tried to do good on week days also, so far as his scanty leisure and small means would permit. What I heard of his unassuming teaching and beneficence interested me greatly. I determined to attend one of his services as soon as I could find an opportunity. It is not often that an East-End curate finds himself without 'duty' on a Sunday, but one Sunday morning I was in that condition, and started for 'Battersby Hall.' Its only frontage to the street was a cramped entrance-passage, which I should have passed without noticing it, had not a board-bill, inviting all to enter, 'free seats and no collection,' leaned against the door-post, and one or two depressed women been dropping into

the passage. I followed the depressed women into an oblong room, with fixed forms running along its sides, and a few movable forms placed across it at the top; behind them, on a little platform, stood a deal table and a stool. A few women who looked as if all energy had been worn out of them, and one or two feeble old men, were dotted about the forms. I seated myself in a corner near the door, where I could see without being seen, and watched the rest of the congregation come in. They were much of the same class—about fifty in all; amongst them the old hare-skin gatherer and poor Tommy. A mild little man in a brown coat and checked neckerchief took his place behind the table, gave out a hymn, and started the tune. Very thin and quavering was the congregational singing that followed, but all the singers seemed to find a comfort in it. As long as the singing lasted

March Hare was as still as a mouse, but during the rest of the service—until the singing began again—he wandered about the room on tiptoe, smiling vacantly at everything and everybody. After a prayer which called forth many a half-smothered amen, the little man in the brown coat read a chapter from the New Testament, and then he took a text, and talked kindly about it to his people—there was no attempt at set sermonizing. Perhaps there was nothing that would have struck critical sermon-hearers in what he said, except an occasional slip in grammar or pronunciation, but *his* hearers drank in his words. They had reached another oasis in their life's desert. They had come from miserable homes, in which there was no privacy or quiet, to rest from work for a while in a tranquil room (in which poor Tommy's movements were not more disturbing than a butterfly's flittings) and hear a good



man, in whom, with much reason, they had full confidence, tell them, in his simple quiet way, of the everlasting rest which remaineth for the people of God. They looked sorry when he had finished, but they sang the final hymn more heartily than the first, and gave lustier amens to the last prayer. ‘The peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord : and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always,’ said the unassuming preacher ; and after a minute’s silent lingering on their knees, his congregation rose, exchanged quiet greetings with him, and then slowly crept back to their dreary homes—made far less dreary because they carried back to them, out of that peculiar little conventicle, some portion of that priceless peace. Poor Tom,

no longer on his good behaviour, capered and chuckled merrily in the open air, but he, too, looked more easy in his mind because he had been to hear the brown-coated little evangelist of Battersby Hall.

## VII.

## ALONE IN LONDON.

A MAN may live for years in London, and not know the name of his next-door neighbour. Lives may be revolutionized by joy or sorrow within a few feet of him, and he may have no suspicion of the fact, unless he happens to see a train of wedding or funeral carriages in the street. His wife knows a little more than he knows of his neighbour's concerns, his servants know a little more than his wife does; but all the knowledge, put together, is very slight and very vague, unless a bridegroom, an under

taker, a baby, or a bailiff, enters the neighbour's house. Even doctors' visits—when the doctor is a strange doctor—are not always noticed; and a man may be distressed to learn that he was entertaining noisy companions at a time when, only separated from him by a brick and a half, his neighbour or his neighbour's wife was enduring the physical torture, or shuddering under the moral solemnity, of the last moments of their life on earth.

To country-people, such a state of things appears horrible. *They* know what their neighbours have for dinner every day, and when the next tooth of every neighbour's child is due; and they think, therefore, that Londoners must be, not merely fish-blooded, contemptibly cold-hearted, but execrably cruel, to trouble themselves so little as they do about the course of their next-door and over-the-way neighbours' lives. We may, with justice,




retort that, though we do not lavish sympathy—a gift, by-the-by, which, proffered as it generally is, wounds at least as often as it heals—although we do not lavish sympathy upon our neighbours in time of suffering, we do not day by day, and even night by night, subject them to persistent, pruriently inquisitive *espionage* of the paltry and yet persecuting kind which obtains in the country—that in no part of the inhabited globe can a man enjoy more undisturbed freedom of thought and rational action than he can in London.

Still there is something sound at the bottom of the country-people's feeling. From a Christian point of view, at any rate, it *does* seem sad that three millions and more of people should be crowded together in this vast, strange jumble of lives which we call 'London' with so little feeling of brotherhood between them. If country-people do pry disagreeably into

their neighbours' daily life, *per contra*, they are proudly fond of trumpeting the exploits of any one they can anyhow call 'our distinguished fellow-townsmen ;' but what man living within a radius of half-a-dozen miles from Charing Cross, feels his heart warming towards another man, however distinguished or undistinguished, on the ground that he is a fellow-Londoner ?

'Alone in London,' in a modified sense, is a phrase that would describe tens of thousands. The married men amongst them might, or might not, be mourned by their families, if they did not come home, or were brought home dead, at night : under similar circumstances, laundresses and landladies, and their slaveys, might pump up a tear for the bachelors, and then begin at once to provide for the next tenant of the chambers or lodgings. A man, of course, would be missed for a day or two, if he did not return to his desk in an office or a bank, or



his work at a shop, a factory, a wharf, or a warehouse. In exceptional cases, a kind-hearted employer would take a real interest in the death or sickness of his employé, and do what he could to mitigate the consequences to the dead or sick man's belongings; but in the majority of instances, I fear, the interest would be like that of the attorney who had heard that his clerk was drowned, and who, thereupon, exclaimed, 'Confound the fellow! He had the key of my office in his pocket.' Londoners have the character of being conceited, but in no place in the world—of course I am speaking of the masses of its inhabitants—is the individuality of a man of less consequence than in London. He is only one of a vast crowd, all hungry for employment; and when his place becomes vacant, it is filled up with a facility that scarcely seems likely to foster conceit.

But there are people in London far

lonelier than those I have referred to—paupers without even the cold comfort of having fellow-paupers to talk with—men and women who are almost literally ‘alone in London.’ *Magna civitas, magna solitudo*—they drink the bitterest dregs of the meaning of that sententiously epigrammatic definition.


I was passing one day a public-house, in what was then my parish. Greatly to my astonishment, in the crowd that was pouring out of it, I saw several small shopkeepers whom I knew, and most of whom I had thought very unlikely *partem solido demere de die* for tippling purposes. I expressed my astonishment to one of them. He very indignantly answered: ‘We’re a jury, sir. I’m the foreman, and that gentleman, with the broad-brimmed hat and the silk umbrella, is the coroner. It’s an inquest, sir. Catch me neglectin’ my business at this time o’ day, if I could help it, but a poor

young fool has been and gone and cut his throat, and we're goin' to view the body.'

I accompanied the jury to the house of death. By the time we got there the attendant mob had so increased that it was as much as two policemen, stationed on either side of the door like mutes, could do to keep the ragged throng from surging up into the room of death. The lodgers in the house, of course, availed themselves of their privilege to crowd up. The landlady was loud in her professions of regret for the fate of the 'pore young man.' She seemed to think that the coroner had come to take her into custody for allowing any one to commit suicide beneath her roof; and in her anxiety to propitiate him, dusted the rail of the banisters as she went up the stairs before him. The chattering crowd stopped talking when the woman opened the door of the garret in which the corpse lay. There was scarcely any furniture in

the room, except the bedless truckle bedstead on which the corpse lay, beneath a mouse-coloured rug, with a clotted gash across the throat. The cold white face looked strangely calm to have that broad mark of desperation straggling blue and brown-red beneath it. A blood-rusted razor, clutched in the rigid right hand, lay upon the rug, which was stained with blood. The threadbare, greasy black frock-coat of the deceased was also spotted with blood, and there was more dry blood on the bare breast. The poor creature had owned no shirt or waistcoat. Scarecrow coat and trowsers, one brace, a battered, napless hat, a pair of burst, almost soleless boots, and the bone-handled old razor that had put an end to his life, were the only discoverable articles of which he had possession when he made up his mind to kill himself.

There he lay, looking, as I have said




1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".



most strangely calm. His was no 'lovely appearance of death'—there was no positive peace in it; but there was a negative tranquillity in the impassive features, which was almost more blood-curdling than a frozen look of horror would have been. We held our breath as we stood crowded in that gloomy garret. Winter sunshine fell on its grime-clouded window, and made a faint little patch of chequered, dingy light upon the rotten, dusty floor; but the icy face of the corpse was the only thing that lighted the dark bedstead. It was a fearfully wasted face, a deplorably care-furrowed face; but now that the cares that had furrowed it were past, a long-obliterated look of refinement seemed to have come to the surface again; and a juryman muttered, 'Poor beggar, he couldn't have been thirty.' No one could speak with certainty as to his age, however—no one knew anything about any part of his life except the




last dreary week of it. There he lay, slain by his own hand—a fellow-creature who could no longer endure the life he led amongst his fellows in the richest city in the world, and so had committed suicide just in time to avoid dying of starvation : that was all we knew, or could guess about him. But it was a terrible ‘ all ’ for one to think of, standing face to face with that quiet, inexpressibly lonely-looking corpse. Every now and then we read of such cases in the newspapers, and as we cursorily read, we say, with a half-conventional sorrow, ‘ How very sad—how wickedly foolish to destroy the life that God has given them, instead of bearing their trials like men, and waiting for better times ! ’ But I can assure my reader that one does not feel inclined for moralizing of this kind in such a presence as I have just described. Rightly or wrongly, it is not the dead man one is disposed to blame. The anguished spirit that,



so short a time before, tenanted the calm corpse which looks so awfully isolated, has gone home and ta'en its wages—but what those wages are, the watcher shrinks from speculating. He thinks rather of the vast pity of Him who has proclaimed Himself a Father to the forsaken. He trembles when he thinks that he, however unwittingly, may have been one of the careless causes that have brought about so terrible a result.

The landlady's evidence at the inquest ran as follows:—"I don't know the name of the pore young man, sir, nor who he was, nor where he came from. He come to me the last Monday as ever was, and axed me if I could let him have a place to sleep in. He'd a shirt on then, pore young man, and, though I see he were hard up, there was somethin' in his way o' talk that made me think he'd seen better days. "Well," says I, "maybe I can, but you

must pay me in advance, and p'r'aps that'll be hill-convenient." Well, sir, that pore young man he took out 2½*d.*, and he said, says he, "That's all I've got." Well, sir, I pitied the pore young man—he was so nice spoken,—so I took his coppers, and I said he might have the garret where you've seen him a-layin' a dead corpse, and I'd trust to him to pay me more when he'd got it. "You won't have to wait long," says he—wild-like, I remembers now; but then I thought he was in speedy expectations o' gittin' work. Well, sir, I took him up to the room where you've seen him a-layin', and says I—for I couldn't help liking that pore young man—"I'm sorry things ain't more comfobler; but when you git your work, I'll see if I can't find you a few more things." "Oh," says he, wery weary-like, I remembers now, "I only want to git a rest, and I can sleep here as well as on a bed o' down." Them was his wery ex-



pressions. Well, sir, he stayed in his room all Monday. Tuesday mornin' he went out, and when he come back, though he'd got his coat buttoned up, I could see that he'd got rid of his shirt. That didn't make me feel comforble about my rent, though nobody can't say I didn't pity that pore young man. Wednesday and Thursday he was out all day, and I began to hope that he'd got work; but when he come back of the Thursday, he looked that dragged and famished, I could see he hadn't, and so I made up my mind to speak to him about lookin' for other lodgin's yesterday mornin'. You may think, sir, what a turn I got when I went into his room, and see him a-layin' on the bed with his throat cut, and the wery razor he'd done it with in his own hand, and my bed-clothes spi'lt with the blood he'd splashed about. I calls up the other lodgers, and

*they* all see him, too, jest as he's a-layin' now, 'cept that the blood hadn't clotted; and Mrs Jack (she's got my parlour) ran for the pollis, and Jack run for the doctor. And that's all I know about that pore young man. If you was to ax me questions for a week, sir, I couldn't tell you no more, and I wouldn't tell you no less, and that I'll take my 'davy of, sir.'

The lodgers, and the policeman, and the surgeon who had been called in, gave their evidence next; but it was merely a corroboration of the landlady's. No one knew anything of the history of the poor self-destroyer, except its calamitous climax. The coroner summed up, suggesting the usual charitable verdict—charitable, but with some amount of fear of personal responsibility lurking in it. 'People *must* be insane, or they wouldn't rush out of a world in which we get on decently well, and

which we help to manage,' is the average juryman's argument. One juryman, however, was obstinate. 'I don't think the young fellow *was* silly,' he said. 'It's plain that, somehow, he couldn't get a living, and so he thought, instead of starving, he'd save himself trouble by killing himself. It goes against my conscience to find him insane. From his p'int o' view his conduct seems sensible like.' Such reasoning, of course, was overruled in time, and the usual verdict was returned. It fell to my lot to bury that unfortunate young man—saved by that verdict from the ignominy—brutal ignominy, I think—then often heaped upon the corpse of a wilful self-destroyer. Seldom have I performed a service sadder to myself, or been better able to understand the superstitious feeling—absurd but amiable—which prompts prayers for the dead.

'God pity him,' I found myself saying,

as I turned away from the pauper-grave in which lay the nameless corpse, not more alone in London than when it took its last lodging there alive.

## VIII.

## MR JONES'S FRIEND.

IN spite of the dislike which Mr Jones had professed for 'big lads' he did not withdraw his favour from Fred when the boy ceased to be a curly-headed little pet. He put him to school, and openly intimated his intention of making him his heir. The boy would have liked to be brought up to the bird-business; but against this Mr Jones set his face. The old man had got it into his head that the dead young mother would have liked something better for her son, and so declared that Master Fred should have a 'purfession.'



‘Not but what I think folks are fools,’ said Mr Jones, ‘when they’ve got nothing else to give ’em, to make genteel beggars of their sons, by bringin’ ’em up to a purfession, instead o’ givin’ ’em a good trade they could make a comfortable livin’ at. But when I’ve paid for his schooling, there’ll be a tidyish bit left for Fred—so *he’s* different; and, besides, he’s an uncommon smart young chap. His schoolmaster says so, and I can see it myself. He’ll make somethin’ out, I think, if *he* turns doctor or lawyer, or a architec’ or a engineer, or anythin’ o’ that sort. Anyhow, I’ve got a notion that it’ll please his poor young mother, and so that’s how I mean it to be, sir.’

After the change in the bird-seller’s character which followed poor Pete’s death, the old man ceased from his constant open railings at women; but a grudge against the sex and other repressed churlishness

still lingered in his heart. The theatre, in my opinion, is the only exhibitor of genuine sudden transformation-scenes. At any rate, although Mr Jones's disposition had wonderfully mellowed, it was apt to become clouded by the crust it had thrown off, if he were not, so to speak, very carefully decanted.

Fred's dead mother was still the only woman, outside the Bible, of whom Mr Jones spoke in terms of praise; and no woman had been allowed to take the place Black Pete had held so long. The old man continued to employ a male factotum. I should rather say that he had a numerous series of such servitors. Notwithstanding the softening of his heart to his fellow-creatures in general, he did not get on nearly so well with the concrete white humanity that could answer him back, as he had got on with the dumb black, to

whom his slightest look was lovingly-accepted law.

‘I can’t tell you how I miss poor Pete,’ the old man often said to me. ‘Fred’s a good boy; but, of course, when he’s got a ’oliday, its nateral that he should care more for his mates’ company than he do for mine. If it wasn’t for my birds and things, I might almost as well be alone in the world.’

I reminded him of that best of all company which we have only to remember to obtain.

‘Yes, sir, that’s true, and, when I do think of it, I git more comfort from it than I deserve, for not thinkin’ of it orfner. But then you see, sir, you can’t help wantin’ somebody of your own sort to care a bit about you. ’Taint many I want; and jest becos I’ve had so few as I could call friends anyways, it do seem hard that now there’s

none that cares a fig about me. If I was to be lyin' dead in my bed to-morrer mornin' at breakfast time, who'd miss me, 'cept my tame rat, 'cos he couldn't git his toast?—an' the birds and things, when 'twas their turn to git their feed?'

'Don't you think I should miss you?'

'Well, maybe, *you* might happen to think of me some day, and git a bit of a turn when you called and found the old chap was gone; but I ain't fool enough to think you'd cry your eyes out after me.'

'And there's Fred, too, isn't there?'

'Yes, I don't say that Fred ain't a good boy. He's a *very* good boy, and nobody can't say to the opposite. I'll do my best to bring him up as his mother would ha' liked, and he shall have my money when I die. I'm findin' no fault with him—I've got no fault to find. Didn't I say that it was on'y nateral that a young lad shouldn't care to stick at 'ome with a sulky old feller

like me? But that don't make it none the less lonely.'

I was grieved to find my friend relapsing, in any degree, into his old morbid state of mind. His second state, so far as his own feeling of it was concerned, was likely to be worse than the first. Then, at any rate, he had a shell of misanthropy to protect him from prods and pinches; but now he had cast that shell. What I feared was that he would soon form another. I called more frequently than my wont to do my 'little best to retard that formation. One summer evening when I called, I was greatly relieved, since I was greeted with a hearty laugh.

'Well, sir,' said Mr Jones, 'you think me a old growler; but I've come across an old feller that beats me 'oller—would ha' beat me in my growlin'est days. It's queer what a likin' I've taken to that old chap, though we're mostly at it, 'ammer


and tongs, all the time we're together. He's a cute old boy in his talk; but there ain't a thing that's right, 'cept his way o' thinkin' o' things, accordin' to him, and his way o' thinkin' is that *everything* you see or hear of is bad, and a-gettin' worse, and I can't stand that, though you know, sir, I don't approve o' argeyment.'

Mr Jones was putting up his shutters, rather earlier than usual. As soon as he had finished, he went on, 'I was goin' round to see old Snap. Perkins is his right name, but Snap's a name he's got, I s'pose, becos he's al'ays a-snappin'. He goes on against parsons, and women, too, a deal worse than ever I did; but it might do both on ye good to come acrost one another.'

When Mr Jones had informed poor Pete's latest successor that he was going out, and had put on his hat, I accompanied him to Mr Perkins's. On the way I was

informed that Mr Perkins was a dealer in waste,' *i. e.* all kinds of printed and MS. paper destined to wrap up cheese, butter, candles, bacon, &c. &c.

He lived on the ground-floor of a shabby little house in a shabby little street, using the 'parlour' for his bed and living-room, and a back room which opened into it by one door for his warehouse. The passage-door of this back-room was screwed up. No answer being given to his knock at the parlour-door, Mr Jones opened it and walked in, motioning to me to follow him. The back-room door was open, and through the door-way we saw a hump-backed old man in dusty shirt-sleeves, with a pipe in his mouth, fumbling about in a mist of tobacco-smoke and a chaos of obsolete stationery. Some of the piles of papers reached to the ceiling. A deep drift of all kinds lay upon the floor; it crackled like frozen snow as the old man moved about in his slippers.



Books without bindings were littered over it; bundles of blue-books and ottoman-like piles of newspapers rose above it.

‘Evenin’, Perkins,’ said Mr Jones, ‘I’ve brought a clergyman to see you.’

‘Then you may take him away again,’ was the polite reply. ‘I’ve nothing to give, and if I had, I wouldn’t.’

‘But he’s come to give you something, Snap. I told him you was sadly in want of some good advice.’

‘Like your impudence, then—(*to me*) when I’m in want of a parson’s advice, sir, I’ll send out and order it, but I don’t think I should send to you, if I ever *did* want anything in your line—and that ain’t likely to happen whilst I’ve got my senses.’

‘Come, Snap,’ said Mr Jones, chuckling over his success in drawing his new acquaintance out, ‘you mustn’t be rude, Snap. Mr B—— is a great friend of mine.’

‘*That* don’t say much in his favour.’




‘Doesn’t it, Snap? Why, *you’re* a great friend of mine too.’

‘Am I? I wasn’t aware of it.’

The old waste-dealer began to look so vicious, in spite of his having had the best in this passage of words, that I thought it advisable to put an end to the old men’s chaffing. I apologized to Mr Perkins for my intrusion, and asked permission to enter his store to get a nearer view of his curious stock.

‘Yes, you may come in,’ he growled. ‘There’s nothing to steal that *you* could make any use of—except some old sermons; and I’ll sell them to you, if you like, at three-halfpence a pound, because they’re a bit mouldy. There’s some divinity books, but they’ve got the backs off. I’ll let you have them at trade price. I wouldn’t charge a parson more than I would a porkman—why should I? Yes, I would, though—if *that’s* what you’ve come



for, if you think you're going to get bargains, I ain't your man—you go and buy fair of the second-hand book-shops. I ain't going to undersell 'em. There's some Greek and Latin books, and French, and that, but p'raps you can't read 'em, though you *are* a parson. I know 'em when I see 'em, and it's as likely as not that's about all you'd know about 'em. Yes, you may come in if you like.'

It was rather difficult to keep one's temper in conversation with Mr Perkins, but, at the same time, it would have been very absurd to seem ruffled by 'old Snap'—on whose Englishman's castle, after all, I had intruded. Mr Jones, who had been amused at first, had become indignant at his new crony's gratuitous insolence, since *he* had been my introducer, and was going to take up conversational cudgels in my defence ; but I managed to quiet him.

'Come in, if you're coming—the both

of ye,' old Snap very snappishly exclaimed. 'Stop a bit, can't ye?' he still more snappishly added, when we were about to accept his invitation. 'If there's nothing for you to steal, there's things you can spoil with your muddy boots. Jones needn't look as if he'd bite my head off—I didn't ask either of you to come interrupting me in what I was about, you'll please to remember.'

With legs and arms, whilst he thus spoke, he ploughed and splashed a cutting through the paper-drift for us to walk in. 'There's a seat for you,' he said to Jones, pointing to one newspaper-ottoman, and you can sit down there, sir—if I must call you sir,' he said to me, pointing to another. Snap seated himself on a pile of blue-books, and took rapid puffs at his pipe, as if anxious to compose himself. His shrewd bright glancing eyes, coupled with his unfortunate deformity, gave him

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a ludicrous resemblance to a grotesque caricature of a squirrel smoking, with its bushy tail showing over its shoulders.

‘And now what is it you’ve come for?’ Mr Perkins inquired abruptly.

Picking up a copy with the covers off which lay upon the ground, I asked him if many Bibles were offered him for sale.

‘Lots,’ he answered. ‘Them and Testaments, and Prayer-Books, and Hymn-books, are about the commonest things I get. Shows how the people value them. I’ve read that they used to have to keep the Bible chained to the desk in churches, that the folks mightn’t prig it. That seems a queer way of showing you’re fond o’ the Bible—prigging. Anyhow, Bibles weren’t sold for waste in them days. But nowadays, when you can get a Bible for next to nothing, folks think no more of ’em than they do of a pin. There’s sure to be


a pin lying about somewhere handy, and so there is a Bible.'

'Well, Snap, ain't that all the better? You can't have too much of a good thing,' remarked Mr Jones.

'That's begging the question, Jones, if you can understand what I mean. I didn't say that I thought the Bible a good thing, or that I didn't. But good or bad, what I mean to say is, that it would be thought a deal more on if it wasn't so common. A herring to my taste is every bit as nice as salmon—what's the reason salmon costs such a sight more? Because it ain't so common.'

'Well, sunlight's common, if salmon ain't; and don't we value *that*? My birds do, I know.'

'I'm not aware that sunlight *is* so very common in this part of the world, except now and then for a spell, and then folks get



not to think about it, and where there's always sunshine, I've heard, the folks get tired of it.'

I asked Mr Perkins what other books found their way to his warehouse. 'Oh,' he answered, 'there's all sorts, as I was telling you—more than you could read. Reams of printed stuff I've bought that nobody ever read except the printers and the feller that wrote it. Whole lots of poetry that could never get even a binding on it. Why will people keep on writing poetry? What's the good of it? It don't tell you anything. And if there *was* any good in it, wasn't there enough of it in the world ever so long ago to satisfy even them that like it? You may choke a dog with pudding. My place I know is sometimes half choked with poetry books and play books. When I go to clear out a place, and see there's poetry in the lot, I tell the folks they ought to let me have it a halfpenny a

pound cheaper than the rest, because rhymes is such a drug. Of course, that's my joke, because the paper the poetry's printed on is about the best I get. It's mostly thick and looks extra clean because it *hasn't* been read, and such a precious little bit of print goes to the page. It makes me think of them dumpy wax candles with the mites of wicks—only there's no light to be got out of the poetry, you see.'

'But don't you read any of the books you git hold of, Snap?' said Mr Jones. 'I thought you was a sensibler sort of a man.'

'What *you* thought wouldn't make much difference, one way or the other, Jones. I shouldn't have much sense if I took to reading them poetry books, and what I'd got would be gone long before I'd finished. Yes, I do read some of the books—doctors' books and such. There's

nicish reading in them. I like travels, too, a bit, and now and then I get hold of an interesting Life, but mostly they're about people that nobody ever knew anything about till they was dead, and then somebody makes 'em out to be the wonder-fullest people that ever lived.'

'Do you like history, Mr Perkins?' I inquired.

'No, I *don't*; though it's often I've to buy a *Goldsmith*. I bought a big hist'ry book once—*Rollin*, or some such name—it was called—and I thought I'd read it through before I sold it. But it was so precious dry I was choked off before I got to the end of the first vol. What do I care about what people did ever so long ago? None of 'em ever left *me* any money.'

'If we did not know what *some one* did ever so long ago, it would be a poor look-out for you and me and everybody, Mr Perkins. You will find that you *have* had



a legacy left you, if you will but read His will.'

'What d'ye mean?'

I picked up one of the coverless New Testaments.

'Oh, it's preaching you're after. You can keep that for Jones; he likes it, or shams to. *I* was talking about hist'ry. Who's to know that it ain't all a make-up? I'd almost as lief read one of them trashy novels. They *do* beat me. Why don't government take up the chaps that writes 'em? If a cove's paid for telling a pack of lies in a court, *he's* took up when he's found out; but a feller's paid to tell a pack of lies in a book, and puts his name to 'em, as proud as a peacock.'

'You don't think much of authors, do you, Snap?' said grinning Mr Jones.

'Authors! They're a precious lot. I knew one once. He was writing a story for the *Firefly*, and gave himself the airs of

a 'toxicated cockrobin. He was going to be famous, he said, and fame brings fortune, the young donkey used to tell me. He wouldn't have his hair cut, because he'd seen pictures of chaps in his line with a lot of hair—p'r'aps they couldn't pay the barber. But the *Firefly* stopped before it was half a year old, and he never got a penny for his rubbishing story. Lots of periodicals like that I've bought, and great bundles of half-crown ones too, that are going on still. If the chaps that write in them, and the newspaper fellers, too, and the rest of them authors, could see themselves when I've got hold of 'em, p'r'aps they wouldn't be quite so bumptious. I sell 'em into captivity, and they're usefuller then than they ever were before. One of 'em wraps up a penn'orth of sugar-stick, or half a ounce of shag; and another a bit of liver, or a pound of eights, or something of that sort. I oughtn't to grumble

at authors, they're a good help to me. The worst book that ever was writ is worth twopence a pound to me.'

Low as was Mr Perkins's estimate of literature, he still, like literature-loving Elia, made *biblia abiblia* distinctions. Under the quoted head he included Parliamentary Papers, missionary notices, and reports of all kinds. 'Oh, I don't count *these* books,' he growled, kicking the pile of blue-books on which he sat, when I had made some inquiry about them. 'Presented to both Houses of Parliament, by command of Her Majesty—I wonder if Parliament says Thankee! Who reads 'em? But we've got to pay for the printing. I'd sooner read *Rollin* than them. It's like eating sawdust and putty. And yet, if you'll believe me, I once found a fairy story in a blue-book. If I'd found a fairy in it I couldn't have been startled.'

Although the cynical conceit of the

old man had amused me, I had been for some time anxious to give our conversation a more 'edifying' turn, and fancied that his last remark afforded me an opportunity.

'You see, Mr Perkins,' I said, 'it is possible even for you to form a false estimate of things. You thought, from ignorance, that nothing in a blue-book could possibly interest you. I fear that from an infinitely more deplorable ignorance, you have formed a similar opinion in reference to an infinitely more important book—one that you buy and sell for waste-paper, but never read for your soul's good.'

I had made a false move, and old Snap was instantly down upon me.

'Who said the fairy-story pleased me? I thought it silly nonsense. And who are you, to talk about my deplorable ignorance? I expect I make pretty nigh as

much a week as you do—more, p'r'aps, when trade is brisk. And I *work* for my living, and use my wits. You change places with me, and see if you'd make as much as I do. Now I could do *your* work to-morrow, if I could only put on a solemn face. I could read the prayers, and I've got a lot of old sermons. I ain't sure though that I could poke myself into places where I wasn't asked, and talk as if I was a saint, and know all the time I wasn't.' Here he paused, but before I could say anything he went on again:—

'I may have my own opinions, but they ain't any concern of yours; and yours ain't any concern of mine, I'd have you know. It's a free country, they say. I don't know so much about *that*, but, at any rate, men as thinks for themselves, and tries hard to earn a honest living, ain't going to have opinions poked down their throats like pills, by lazy parsons. You

ain't a *priest*. There's some sense in them Roman fellers riding the high horse, because they believe, or make believe to believe, that they've got hold of what's the Truth, and no mistake about it; but you English parsons talk about the right of private judgment, and I'm a-going to exercise it.'

The old man was so wrathful in his rudeness, that I thought any argumentative reply just then would be merely adding fuel to flames.

'I am afraid, Mr Perkins,' I said, 'that I *have* intruded on you when you were busy. May I call again when you have more leisure, and hear something more about your trade?'

Mr Jones, however, struck in, in a very different key.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Snap. But that's always the way with you. Git you up in a corner, and you fly

at a body as wicious as a rat. The fact is, Snap, you're afraid of argeyment, and when anybody begins it when you're in your own house, you bully because it *is* your own house. It ain't such a palace that it's a punishment to be druv out of it.'

It was rather droll to hear this speech from the whilom 'argeyment'-shying Mr Jones; but it took instant effect upon Mr Perkins.

'I ain't driving anybody out of my house,' he said. 'I didn't ask you to come, nor your parson either, but you're both of ye welcome to stay as long as you like. I ain't put in any corner, so far as *I* see.'

'Ah, now you're quieting down—I've got a tame rat at home, you know, Snap,' said mischievous Mr Jones.

'You're a rat yourself,' was old Snap's spiteful retort. 'You didn't use to be a saint, I've heard, but now you want to creep up the parson's sleeve.'

To put a stop once more to the old men's sparring, I thought the most sensible thing for us to do would be to retire; but Mr Jones would not consent to this.

'Don't you go, sir,' he said; 'if you do, Snap will brag for a week that he druv me and the parson away because we couldn't answer him. Don't you stir, sir.'

'But suppose I say you *shall* go,' growled Mr Perkins. 'I pay my own rent, and so I've a right to my own rooms, and I owe no rent, and so if you was bum-bailiffs, I could order you off.'

'Of course, Mr Perkins,' I put in, 'we've no right to stay, if you wish us to go; but I should like to part good friends, and I want to hear a little more about your business, if you've no objection.'


'Well, you know how to behave yourself better than Jones—though that ain't saying much. I've no objection to your staying a bit longer—you ain't so much in



the way ; for I've nothing particular to do to-night. What is it more you want to hear ?'

' I think you said something about the stories that might be made out of the lawyers' briefs you buy—I suppose you fall in with other papers that have histories in them.'

' Yes, some comical hist'ries I've come across in my time, but then the people are all dead years ago, or gone across the sea nobody knows where, and so it don't matter who reads about them. Old account books I buy, and *they* tell tales. Ladies, nor gentlemen either, wouldn't like everybody to know the things they get booked to them. And what good have they done them at last? They're rotting in their graves, with the worms crawling in and out of their eye-holes, for all the stuff they bought to make fools think them pretty. The bad debts, too, I've found out! What



I've give for the books is all the money that was ever got out of a good many of the accounts in 'em. I'm fond of reading them account-books, though it did all happen so long ago. It's improving reading—it opens a man's eyes. Though to be sure, a man must be a born fool himself if the light of natur' didn't teach him that most folks is either rogues or fools, and the rest of 'em a little of both.'

'Some folks, p'r'aps, is a good bit of both, Snap,' was Mr Jones's satirical comment.

'Well, *you* ought to know about that, Jones,' was Mr Perkins's courteous retort.


'Anyhow,' rejoined Mr Jones, 'I don't believe in that kind of talk now. When I hear a man makin' out that everybody else is a rogue or a fool, my belief is that he's measuring his neighbours' corn with his own two bushels.'

'I wasn't talking to you, Jones—I was

talking to the parson. Speak when you're spoken to. Jones may say what he likes, but if there's no rogues nor fools in the world, who writes the letters I get hold of sometimes, and who reads 'em? Now here's a comical collection.'

So speaking, he took up a packet of lankily oblong epistles of the pre-penny postage time—many of them densely crossed. Some of them were splashed with sealing-wax 'kisses.'

'If there'd been more of 'em,' he said, as he scornfully turned the letters over with his pipe-stem, 'I'd have had the seals off before I bought them, for the wax weighs heavier than the paper, I should say; but they was only thrown in just to make up a lot I bought at a lawyer's. I suppose it was some breach of promise case. There's letters from the silly young girl, and from the chap that was spoony on her. He was tremendous spoony at first, but he



gets sharp enough when he's had his will, and the silly young woman keeps on writing to him as if there wasn't such another lover in the world. "Only put a little more love into your letters," says she. "I know it is in your heart, and it is such a comfort to me, Arnold, to get kind words from you—the only kind words I care about now—for I am very lonely, and should be very sad if I did not look forward to our living together soon, oh, so happily! Be sure I will never injure you with your parents, my precious pet, but they don't see your letters, so *please* make them more as you used to talk, my own sweet Arnold.' *My precious pet, my own sweet Arnold!*—and yet Jones says there ain't rogues and fools in the world. There's letters from the silly young woman's mother, and the chap's parents and relations, and all sorts of people. It's a queer kettle o' fish to be all put together in one bundle. I should like

to know what the girl thinks of her chap now—if they're both of 'em alive. If she's got good damages—and she'd a right to 'em, I suppose—I'll be bound she didn't break her heart about her sweet Arnold. It's humbug all through, is life, whatever Jones may say—sometimes you humbugs, and sometimes you're humbugged.'

'And you think God created us for *that*?'

'I said nothing about being created, or what we was created for, what I say is that everything's humbug, more or less, and if it wasn't not exactly comfortable to think of what may happen to you when you tumble into the next world, if there *is* one, I often feel so sick of *this* that I should be glad to be out of it.'

'Well, if there *ain't* a next world, Snap,' moralized Mr Jones, 'I don't see that dying would do you much good. If you was just nothing at all, how could you

tell that you *was* better off? And if there *is* a next world, according to your way of talking, you don't seem by any means sure that you'd get the good part of it, though you *are* too good for this world. It's bosh growling at the world your way. You try to make it a bit better instead of growling at it. There's plenty of room for improvement in it, I don't deny; but it's my belief, Snap, if you was to try to *do* some of the improvement, you'd find you'd such a lot to do in your own self that you'd begin to doubt whether you was quite a proper judge about other folk's badness. Put that in your pipe, old boy, and smoke it. Good-night, Snap; we'll be going now, sir, if it's convenient.'

So saying Mr Jones put on his hat and walked out of the room, and when I had bidden Mr Perkins good evening, I followed.

'I think I've given Snap a pill,' said Mr

Jones when we got into the street, 'and I 'ope it'll do him good. You'll excuse me, sir, but you're a bit too mealy-mouthed with such as him. I know you was with me. Such chaps want to have the conceit knocked out of 'em. If you're civil to 'em, they think it's becos they're so mighty clever that you're afraid to tackle 'em. You should let 'em see that other folks don't think they've half a quarter of the sense they're so proud on.'

## IX.

## MR JONES'S CUSTOMER.

THROUGH my acquaintance with Mr Jones, I became acquainted with a far more agreeable person to spend an hour with than Mr Perkins. I was in the bird-seller's 'Russian Herby' one evening, chatting with the old man, whilst Fred gravely got up his next day's lessons in a chair over which I had often seen him clambering in the days of poor Black Pete, when the bell hung on the shop-door tinkled, and a slim, sensible-looking man came in and knocked with his knuckles on the counter. The



bell and the knocking so excited the noisy portion of Mr Jones's stock that I could not hear a word of the conversation which followed between him and his customer.

'That's a very decent feller,' said Mr Jones, when he came back, 'and used to make a very decent living. He's like most folks now, though, poor chap—'ard put to it orfen, and then he's a score and more of mouths to fill, whether he's got anything for his own or not.'

'You don't mean to say that the poor man has such a family as *that*!'

'Yes, I do, sir,' answered Mr Jones, laughing, 'and as well-behaved a family as you'd wish to see. It's a 'Appy Family—beasts and birds, you know, sir—and a good thing he used to make of it. I've heard him say that when he first started, he could clear his £2 or £3 a week easy, and now sometimes he don't take as much in a day as it costs him to feed his things.'

The chap that started them 'Appy Families, Crook says, minted money by his at first, but he was poor enough before he died. Partly the novelty was wore off, and then he'd been copied by so many.'

'But isn't it the same all round? Go where you will, you find that poor people haven't the pennies to spare they used to have.'

'That's the story everybody I come acrost tells me; though, mind you, sir, I don't believe all I hear about the lots they used to git. I've noticed that when things is taper with a chap, he gits a queer kind of pleasure out of tryin' to make folks believe that he was uncommon well off ever so long ago—or if *he* worn't somebody as belonged to him was.'

'Are you talking of your friend now?'

'No, he's a very worthy feller—a real *good* feller, I believe—and I think you'd, too, sir, if you knew him, though he ain't


much of a church-goer. There's a verse he's very fond of quotin' out of a poetry-book he's got 'old of:—

“He prayeth best who loveth best  
All things, both great and small;  
For the dear God that loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.”

He don't quote the lines about himself, but they fit him to a T. He's as fond of his things as if they was his own flesh and blood—a deal fonder than some folks is of *their* flesh and blood.'

'But is it only birds and beasts that he cares for?'

'No, man, woman, nor child he won't see put upon, if he can help it, quiet-spoken though he be. He's a nateral lean-in' to make friends with them of all sorts as wants a friend, and most folk's leanin', I'm afraid, is jest the other way. Friends is like flies for the most part—they go buzzin' in swarms wherever there's most to be got.'



Seeing that I dissented from his sweeping assertion, he went on—

‘You needn’t shake your ’ead at me, sir. Don’t the Bible say, “men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself?” I should like you to know Crook, sir.’

‘Does he come here often?’

‘Every now and then he wants something in my way—seed, or a fresh bird, or so on—and so I git a chat with him. He’s got some notions that you might think queer—about beasts and birds going to heaven, and such—and sometimes I’m half inclined to think he’s right, though I do git up a kind of mild argeyment with him. “Crook,” says I one day, “can you show me a verse in the Bible that says they’ll go to heaven?” “Mr Jones,” says he, “can you show me a verse that says they *won’t*?” “By-the-by,” says I, “there *is* something about beasts in the Revelations.” But Crook is a bit of a

scholar, and a thorough honest feller. He wasn't going to take advantage of me. He told me that "beasts" wasn't the proper word to be used there. I should like you to know Crook, sir—he's very pleasant company.'

'Did he ever tell you how he trained his animals?'

'I've often talked to him about his secret, but he al'ays says that it's only patience and not being harsh to 'em. He ain't a joking man in a general way, but says he one day—he's a bachelor like myself—"I believe, Mr Jones, you might tame the worst wife that ever was, if you'd only be patient with her and kind to her—*lettin' her know at the same time that you was her master.*" I'm not so sure that Crook could manage a scolding wife—he'd be too soft-hearted for her, I fancy, but I don't doubt that that's his system with his 'Appy Family. It's a mystery to me, though,

how he can manage such things so much better than me, that have lived all my life amongst 'em—though I'm fond of 'em, too. If he gits his living by 'em, so do I; and I've been at it almost since I can remember: now he didn't take to his present business till he was quite a man—I don't suppose he's been in the country a dozen times in his life; and the chap that started the 'Appy Families was a towney, too, he says—some kind of a weaver out Brum-magem or Manchester way.'

'I should certainly like to see Mr Crook.'

'If you'd like to see him, sir, I'm sure he'd like to see you, sir—'specially if you told him that I'd ast you to have the kindness to call. You'd git on well together. I won't offer to go with you, because I think you'd git on better by yourselves. He ain't like old Snap, sir—it would ha' beén a sin to take you *there*, without lettin' you


have some one with ye that wasn't too polite to growl back again at the old bear.'

'Is he in my parish?'

'Yes, Thompson Street, leading out of James Street, is where he lives—first house on the right as you go in, and the first door on the right as you go into the house. You'd better call latish, sir.'

I followed Mr Jones's advice when I paid my visit to Thompson Street, but found that Mr Crook was out. 'Wantin' to see Mr Crook, sir?' inquired the woman of the house, coming out of a back room, when I had knocked a second time at Mr Crook's door. 'He ain't come in yet, but I expect him in every minute. I've got his kittle bilin' for him. Will you come and set down in my place till he comes?—if you'll excuse the muddle I'm in, sir.'

Whilst I was sitting with his landlady, I heard more good opinions of Mr Crook.




He was 'sich reg'lar pay,' and so 'quiet-behaved,' and so kind to everybody. 'I biles his kittle reg'lar for him,' said the woman. 'It saves him a bit o' coals, and then he can git his tea as soon as he likes, and he must want it, poor feller. I'm bound to do all I can for him as 'll do anythin' he can for me. Anythin' he can do, he will do, for anybody, if it comes to that.'

As it was clearly impossible to hear much about the lodger without hearing a great deal more about the landlady, I allowed her to speak on without interruption.

'I ain't 'zackly 'appy with my 'usband. Take him through and through, from year's end to year's end, and there's 'undreds of women wuss off than me, but still he's fond of drink, I can't deny, and when he's in his tantrums he thinks nothin' o' smashing the furnitur', and wallopin' me



with the back of a chair, or anythin' else that comes 'andy. He's a wery 'igh-sper-rited man. He'd be wery sorry if he 'urt me, for he's very fond o' me in his 'eart, is Stubbs; but I should horfen be murdered if it wasn't for Mr Crook. Hout *he'll* come, and he'll quiet Stubbs down, though my 'usband could eat him, 'ead and all, like a shrimp, if he chose. And when there's rows in the house amongst the other lodgers, they'll mind Mr Crook, somehow, ten times more than they will Stubbs, or me either, though I'm screechin' my heyas out to git 'em to 'old their n'ise. It's queer,—and him that's sich a mite of a man, and don't speak much louder than a mouse. But he's a deal o' sperrit, in a quiet way, has Mr Crook, though you mightn't think it to look at him. Up he'll walk to big blackguards—I'm not speakin' o' Stubbs—at his wust nobody can say as Stubbs is a blackguard—but reg'lar bully-




in' blackguards. Up Mr Crook 'ill walk to 'em as cool as a cowcumber, though I don't s'p'ose he ever give a man a black heye in all his born days, or 'ud know how if he'd got the chance. And then he's sich a kind chap. I'd a poor boy—he's gone now, thank God—that was a great burden to us. He'd 'urt his back, and couldn't do nothin' when he come out of the hospital; he was a great trial to us—he was that peevish—let alone his not bein' able to do nothin' for hisself. But Mr Crook would come in of a night and a Sunday, and set with poor Tom, talkin' an' readin' by the hour together—and he'd bring him horanges. I do believe poor Tom loved Mr Crook better than his own father, or me either. A mother's 'eart, sir, can't 'elp feelin' soft to them as 'as been kind to her dead children, though p'r'aps she 'adn't much reason to be proud on 'em when they was alive. There he is, sir—I'll take him in

his kittle, and tell him you're 'ere.'

When Mrs Stubbs came back, Mr Crook came with her. I gave him Mr Jones's *vivâ voce* introduction, and was instantly asked, with a good-humoured smile, to step into his room. A good part of it was filled up by the Happy Family cage that had been wheeled into it. The kettle stood upon the hob.

'Perhaps you'll excuse me, sir,' said Mr Crook, 'if I make up a bit of a fire before I begin to talk, to keep the kettle on the boil, and then, perhaps, you'll do me the honour to take a cup of tea with me. I let my fire go out when I leave in the morning.'

When the chips had been blown into a blaze, and the coals had caught, he put the kettle on them, and it soon began to bubble, hiss, puff, and fume as merrily as when Mrs Stubbs had taken it off her fire. In the mean time he had brought out a




little black teapot, and a couple of blue and white cups and saucers, &c. When he had made tea, and put the pot on the hob to 'draw,' he said, 'And now, sir, if you'll excuse me, I'll look after my young people. They want their suppers, and to go to bye-bye.'

The feathered and furred inmates of the cage were crowded about its door, jabbering, squeaking, grunting, croaking, and chirping very impatiently. As soon as Mr Crook approached them, however, they fell back, and then, when he had opened the door, hopped, and dropped, and flopped, and fluttered, and floundered out in single file. As soon as they were out they instantly made their way to the perches, and holes, and hutches which they had chosen for themselves, or their master had supplied them with, about his room. It wasn't exactly pleasant to feel two or three rats slipping between one's legs to a snug

hollow by the fire-place. The cat marched up to the fender, stretched herself, gaped, mewed, as much as to say, 'I'm ready for my milk,' and then lay down in the fire-light to wait for it. Some of the birds perched on the rail of their master's bed. The monkey shambled to the foot of the bed, threw back the clothes, jumped up, and tucked himself in, instantly untucking himself to put out his paw and jabber for his nightly rations. It was some time before all the animals had been served with their supper. When they had got it, the menagerie atmosphere—smells of mice and stale cabbage-leaves being the dominant tones of its malodour—was somewhat overpowering.

When Mr Crook came back to give me the cup of tea to which he had hospitably invited me, I did not feel much inclined for any refreshment except fresh air. 'Shall I open the window again, sir?' Mr

Crook said anxiously, when he noticed my white face. 'I always leave it a bit open when I go out, to keep the room as sweet as I can, but I forgot you weren't used to animals. Would you like to have a smoke, sir? If you haven't a cigar with you, I can get you a clean pipe in a minute. It won't hurt the youngsters—they like it. I smoke myself, and so does Mr Jones when he comes here, though he is used to animals, but his is a great deal airier place than mine. Do have a pipe, sir—I can assure you it won't annoy the youngsters. If I weren't to watch him, my monkey there would often be having a smoke. I've caught him taking a pipe, and downright he seemed to enjoy it. Have a smoke, sir, and the sickness will be gone in a second.' Not being a smoker, I was not so sure of that. I took a cup of tea instead, and when the window had been opened, gradu-



ally accustomed myself to my surroundings.

All the creatures had so thoroughly enjoyed their supper that I expressed my astonishment at creatures so sharp-set abstaining from the chances the cage afforded them of preying on their natural food. Mr Crook was a bit of a fanatic, in a harmless way. 'I'm not sure,' said he, 'that animals *are* animals' natural food—that is, when they are brought back to an upright state of nature. Teach them to love one another, and they won't eat one another; though I'll own that if I put a thing they haven't been taught to love into the cage, they'll be down upon him fast enough.'

'Isn't that natural instinct asserting itself?'

'In my belief, it's rather half-mastered depravity cropping up again. I don't give my youngsters what you call their natural





ink. We read in the Bible that we may  
eat freely of every tree and green herb.'

'But we read in the Bible also, "Every  
moving thing that liveth shall be meat for  
you."'

'Yes, sir; but go on with the verse, if  
I may make so bold.'

"——even as the green herb have I  
given you all things." What do you say  
to that, Mr Crook?'

'I hope you won't think me forward,  
sir. It seems impudent in a man like me  
to dispute about the meaning of the Bible  
with a clergyman that has spent I don't  
know how many years in studying it in the  
original tongues at college.' [No satire  
was intended, but, remembering the pro-  
fundity of my Biblical research at Cam-  
bridge, I could not help feeling severely  
lashed, 'for self and university.'] 'I don't  
like to seem forward, but I don't take that  
text as you do, sir. The meaning I should


give to it is this,—You don't take any animal life away when you eat a vegetable, and so long as you remember that, you may eat what animals will give you. I'm doubtful about eggs. The chances of life are out of them long before they get to the shop, but still if they'd been properly hatched they'd have been chickens. So I don't eat them myself. I'll confess, though, I've given chopped-up hard-boiled egg to my birds, and they relished it, but that's not their sin, but mine for giving it to them. I wasn't always a vegetarian, and I feel frightened when I think of the animals I have helped to eat. If God, as the Bible goes on to say, will require the blood of our lives at the hand of every beast, of course he will require the blood of the life of every beast at our hand. We're on an equality so far, it seems to me.'

A craze of this kind was too amiable to wrangle over. 'Well, well, Mr Crook,' I said, 'I will leave you to think as you like about Noah's time; but farther on in the Bible, you know, there are orders about the slaughtering of birds and beasts, and farther back, you know, Abel brought the firstlings of his flock for an offering, and they were accepted when Cain's fruit of the ground found no favour.'

'I can't believe, sir, that Abel *killed* his lambs. Mightn't he have set them apart, called them God's lambs, and made special pets of them, till God took them back to himself?'

'Ah, Mr Jones told me that you believed beasts had a hereafter.'

'I do, sir, and a happy hereafter; because I believe in God. He wouldn't have created things to suffer for no fault of their own, and then not make it up to them ten



times over somewhere. I needn't tell you, sir, that God means good. And would *that* be good ?'

By this time, to use a slang phrase, I had taken Mr Crook's measure, and felt no inclination to controvert anything he might say ; merely wishing to get him to manifest his idiosyncrasy as openly as possible.

' Well, but, Mr Crook,' I asked, ' what about the beasts and birds that were ordered to be slain ?'

' It's a mystery to me, sir,' he answered, ' that God should give in to the hardness of men's hearts. But we've Christ's word for it that He did—any way, that He let Moses say so in his name. It's a mystery, sir—that's my answer to your question. But what a deal of kindness to animals there is in the Bible—about the sparrows not falling to the ground, and God feeding the young ravens when they cry, and looking after your enemy's ox, and not muz-

zling your own when he treadeth out the corn ! Don't you think there was a Happy Family in the Garden of Eden, sir ? Adam didn't stick the young lambs when they ran up to rub their little noses against his legs, and skin them, and give them to Eve to roast. And if the devil did get inside the serpent and leave his venom in him, it won't be always so. . Some snakes have worked the poison off already ; and don't we read that " the sucking-child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den " ? And what does the Prophet Isaiah say just before ?—" The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together ; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed ; their young ones shall lie down together ; and the lion shall eat straw like an ox." What's that,

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sir, but a Happy Family?—as things were before sin came into the world, and as they'll be again when it's washed out of it? Learned folks say that the lion could not eat straw, but there, you see, he will. They'd say that mice is my cat's natural food, but she lets them run all over her, and nibble for fun at her tail, without ever thinking of hurting them.'


'And you think, Mr Crook, that animals might be educated into millennial peace?'

'I really think they might, sir, if men would take the pains, and set them a better example. So far as eating one another goes, look at mine, sir. I've a hawk, and an owl, and a crow, and a monkey, and a cat, and I used to have a dog, and a coati-mundi, and I've a jackdaw, and a jay, and a starling, and a couple of pigeons, and a bantam cock and hen, and a magpie, and rats, and rabbits, and ferrets, and mice, and three guinea-pigs, and sparrows, and a

hedgehog; and they'd starve before one of them would make a meal of another.'

'Have you ever tried them?'

'Well, no, of course, I wouldn't be so cruel. But I've let them go long enough without food, to be sure I'm only saying what's correct. Why, just look behind you, sir—the rats and the ferrets have gone to sleep together cuddled up in a heap, and my cat here suckled some of those rats. You'll read of cats doing that, too, in natural-history books. So you see sometimes, without being trained, they can get the better of what you call their natural instinct. I mentioned that to Mr Jones once, but he said it was only because the cat wanted to relieve herself, or because she was fattening up the young rats as a farmer fats bullocks; but that seems a low view to take—and I fancy it's only Mr Jones's joke, for he's very fond of animals, and has tamed that rat of his in a surprising man-



ner considering that he never gave any particular thought to the subject.'

'It seems to be your belief that animals are very much like men.'


'Yes, I believe they might all be brought to a proper way of thinking and feeling if they'd proper pains taken with them. I'd a deal of trouble with the hawk I've got at present, but now he'll let the sparrows take the food right out of his beak, and never say a word.'

'You haven't cured your young friends of stealing, then?'

'Well, sir, you know men have very different opinions on the subject of property. There's a Frenchman, I've read in the papers, thinks it's robbery; and that may be the sparrows' opinion, when they see the hawk eating something they'd like to have. It's the hawk, you see, sir, they may think the thief. But now you mention it, I'll own that it doesn't seem pretty of the



sparrows to take the hawk's food away just because they know he won't hurt them. My system falls short a long way of what I want it to do; but that's my fault and not the animals'. If the teacher was a bit nearer perfection himself, why, then, perhaps, he'd have a better right to grumble that his scholars weren't. My crow, I'm sorry to say, is very spiteful still, and very deceitful. He'll give his neighbour a nasty dig, and then look away as innocent and as sleepy as an old Quaker gentleman twiddling his thumbs. The magpie, too, is very fond of scaring anything that will let itself be bullied; and the monkey is an awful tease. He'll shake the owl off its perch when it's dozing, and pinch the cat, and take a mouse up by the tail and swing it round and round like a sling. And yet there's a deal of goodness in Jacko. He'll drive the magpie off when it's bullying, and if he takes a fancy to a little thing,



he'll toss it and hug it and feed it like a mother.'

Seeing me smiling, he observed, ' You may well laugh, sir, and think me weak-minded, but there's another thing I'll tell you about Jacko. I've read that man is the only creature on earth that has got reason and a notion of God. I'm by no means sure of that—I fancy it's a bit of our conceit. If we *are* the only creatures on earth that have got them, a very poor use a good many of us make of them, at any rate.'


' Do you believe that animals have reasoning faculties, then ? '

' I can't believe that they haven't. I've seen my things think a matter out as sensibly as any man could do. I dare say you know the story of the dog that lost his master, and scented him to a place where three roads met ; up two of them he ran snuffing, but when he came back, he

galloped along the third without putting his nose to the ground. Wasn't that reason, sir?—and I've seen my youngsters do things every bit as sensible as that.'

'And I suppose you believe, too, that animals know that God made them.'

'He's made a lot more of them than He has of us, and so I can't see why we should fancy that we are the only ones that He has let know who made them. They've as much right to call themselves His creatures as we have, and what right have we to say that He hasn't let them know it? When I wake up in the summer mornings, and hear my sparrows chirping in their cage, and the sparrows chirping up above on the roof, it seems to me as if they were singing their morning hymn — having family prayers in their little way. And they twitter in the same way, only quieter, just before they go to sleep. Hear a lark, too, sing in the morning!—the man on the



first-floor up above has got one that he hangs outside his window when the weather's fine—isn't *that* a morning hymn? Could the singers in surplices at the Temple Church beat *that*, sweet as it is to hear them?'


'I have not the least doubt, Mr Crook, that it *is* a morning hymn, and I am inclined to think with you that the lark must be in some way conscious that it is so—but you were going to tell me something about Jacko.'

'Well, sir, it was this. Whenever Jacko happens to wake up when I'm going to bed, and sees me saying my prayers, out he jumps, and kneels down by me, and puts his paws together like a child, and moves his lips like mine. At first I thought it was only funny imitation, but he tires of most of his tricks in that way after a bit, and he keeps on at this. You may smile, sir—I expected you would—but it's my

belief that Jacko has got it into his head that, since he can do so many things that men do, he would like to worship God in their way instead of the way he's been accustomed to. I can't say what that was, but I know that Jacko, when he's at prayers—comical though he is at most times,—looks serious enough to shame a good many church-goers. If he *doesn't* mean what he's doing, he *shams to* far better than a good many men and women do. I was saying so to Mr Jones one day.'

'And what did Mr Jones say?'

'“Don't get into that way of talking, Crook. I've given it up, and I don't want you to fall into it. There's no comfort to be got out of it.” But then Mr Jones, sensible as he is, isn't always consistent. Directly afterwards he burst out laughing. “You've hit it, Crook,” he said. “Most people, I believe, do get up and down at church exactly like your monkey; only




they can't sham as well, or they won't take the trouble to." But that, I need not tell you, sir, wasn't my point of view. I don't think that Jacko does sham. He only thinks that he has found out a better mode.'

If Mr Crook had had any money to leave, any one to whom he had willed it would, no doubt, have felt very anxious, had the legatee heard him propounding such opinions. For my own part, in spite of his craze, I felt a hearty respect for him.

'If all people thought like you, Mr Crook,' I said to him, when I was bidding him good-bye, 'there would be no need of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; but are you quite sure that your animals would not be happier out of your cage than they are in it?'

'I've thought that matter over seriously, sir, and I don't think they would. It isn't that I get my living by them. It isn't

much of a living nowadays, and there are other things that I could do that would bring me in, at any rate, as much as I get by my cage. But I don't think they *would* be better off, if I was to let them go. They'd be quite unfit for the ways of the world from which I've partly weaned them. They'd starve or get killed. Some of them, perhaps, would backslide into their old ways, and that would be worse almost. No, sir, I'll keep my youngsters as long as I've food to give them. *I* feel like a preacher, too, when I wheel my Family out. There's two texts to that sermon—"One God and Father of us all," and "God is Love."



## X.

## A BLACK MISSIONARY TO THE BLACKS.

UNLESS you are Lucretianly selfish enough to feel your own comfort heightened by others' sufferings, it is like a draught of icy wind rushing into the warm bed to be awoke at five o'clock on a winter's morning by a ponderous single knock, followed by a hoarsely shrill shout of 'swee-weep!' The stars shine with a cold, steel-like brilliance between the snow-furred chimney-pots over the way. You hear the black familiar in waiting tramping up and down on the ice-glazed, snow-caked pavement, coughing, clapping his



hands on his breast, blowing on his fingers, and ever and anon repeating his knock and cry to hurry the sleepy, miserable maiden who has to let him in. She huddles on her clothes, a blink of candle-light glances into your bed-room as she slips past on her way to the drear, chill under-regions. The sound of the undoing of a door is heard, and presently a rumbling in the chimney; and listening, you wonder, just before you drop off to sleep again, which feels the more wretched—the working sweep, or the watching servant.

It chanced one winter morning that the maiden commissioned to let the sweep into my humble establishment proved deaf to his knockings and shouts, and my staff of servants being as modest as my house, there was no fellow-servant to rouse her. Accordingly I had to go down to let the man in. Kicking the snow off his boots,

he clumped up the steps, when I opened the door.

‘Hoverslep’ yourself, eh, Mary?’ he said in a cheery tone, as he came in. ‘I don’t wonder at it. I should ha’ liked to sleep a bit longer such a mornin’ as this. Law, sir, I beg your pardon, I’d no notion it was you. You’ll ketch your death o’ cold standin’ shiverin’ there without your stockins. You go up to bed agin. I’ll bang the door arter me when I’ve done. I shan’t steal nothin’,’ he added with a smile. ‘I see you every Sunday at church, sir; but I’ve got a cleaner face then than I have now.’

There was such an honest ring in the old man’s voice, that even if I had possessed anything within his reach worth stealing, I should have trusted him. I was glad enough to jump into my warm bed again, but as I did so, I felt ashamed of myself. A younger man somehow feels

*little* when he sees an old man cheerfully doing work and bearing hardship—whatever they may be—that he would shrink from. And besides that, I felt ashamed that the sweep should know me well as his clergyman, whilst I knew nothing of him as a parishioner beyond what his red-tape-bound card hung up in the kitchen told me. From that I had learnt that he beat carpets as well as swept chimneys, and in both capacities, I believed, my maiden had employed him to her satisfaction; but I had never thought of the chimney-sweeper and carpet-beater as a fellow Christian, and large as was the parish in which I then laboured, I felt that I could not excuse myself. He had been often in my house, he came regularly to church; and yet, until I happened to have to let him into my house, I had taken as much or as little human interest in his brush, as I had in its wielder.

After this I soon made his acquaintance. His little house certainly was not free from the stifling scent of soot, but his wife who let me in, the little passage into which I stepped, and the little parlour into which I was shown, were all startlingly clean. There being no fire in the prim little parlour, I asked leave to sit in the kitchen; and that, too, though a good deal more comfortable, was almost as clean.

‘Sam’l will be in directly, sir, he’s cleanin’ hisself. An’ p’r’aps you’ll be so good as to hexcuse me, sir, I was jest a-goin’ out when you knocked. I’ll tell Sam’l to ’urry hisself.’ So spake the sweep’s wife as she left the room, and presently ‘Sam’l’ entered in decent clean clothes, and with a face that shone from yellow soap and friction, although a fringe of black cloud still lingered, so to speak, on its horizon.

‘Your house is very different, Mr

Craske, from what I had fancied,' I said with a laugh. 'I had got a notion that I should be ankle-deep in soot.'

'You'd be a good bit over that, sir, if you was to step across into the outhouse, but I like to have my own place tidy, and so does my old woman. It ain't that I was brought up to such ways, for a sut-bag was the only bed I had when I was 'prentice. There's sweeps' houses still, too, where you might find a lot o' sut hinside—whole nests o' sweeps and sweeps' women that scarce gives theirselves a wash from year's hend to year's hend. There they huddles together and squabbles together, jest like pigs aboard a Hirish packet, till the walls is as black as the chimbley.'

'How do *you* manage to keep your place so clean?'

'Well, you see, sir, I've got a side-way to my backyard, and that's a 'elp. And

then I've got a good wife, instid o' keepin' a drunken woman, an' gittin' drunk along wi' her, an' pitchin' into her, and her pitchin' into me. We respect each other, and that 'elps us to respect ourselves. And we've both got right notions, I 'ope, about things in your line, sir, and that's another 'elp. Cleanliness is next to godliness, they say, but in my way o' life it's the t'other way, I think. It wasn't till I took a serious turn that I cared about cleanin' myself. Of a Saturday night I takes a warm bath over there in Vitechap'l, and I takes my Sunday things with me, and when I've got my clean shirt on, I feels as if Sunday was begun.'

'You don't look much like a chimney-sweep *now*, Mr Craske.'

'Oh, I allus gives myself a good sluice every night when my work is done, and changes my clothes. But that ain't like Saturday's wash. I enjy my meals twice

as much a-Sundays as other days. If I could manage it, I'd put off my grubbin' till I'd cleaned myself at night, but I'm too sharp-set for that.'

'And how do you spend your evenings?'

'Oh, my old gal's good company. We talks, and I spell her a bit out o' the paper, and reads her a chapter, or a good book, and so on. And then——'

Mr Craske stopped suddenly.

'Well, Mr Craske, and then?'

'Why, you see, sir, I don't like to talk as if I was braggin', but I'm a bit of a public character of an evenin',' he answered with a grin.

'In what way?'

'Why, you see, sir, I'm a Total Ab-stainer, and so's my old gal. Not that I'd want her to be, if she didn't like it, for she never took enough to 'urt her, but I used to be a hawful lushington. There's lots

of sweeps is still, and a missionary that goes about amongst 'em, and is a teetotal-ler hisself, says to me one day, "I can't do anythin' with them—they won't listen to me, or if they do, it's only to chaff me afterwards; but if *you* was to speak to 'em, Craske, p'raps they might mind you more. You know what a good thing Total Abstinence has been to you," says he, "and it's your duty to try to make your fellow-tradesmen see the benefit of it." Well, sir, he borrered a room, and he got me to let him give out amongst 'em that a sweep wos goin' to talk to sweeps in it. "A Talk with Sweeps *by* a Sweep" was what he put on the little bills he got printed. A lot of 'em came for the fun of the thing, and rare game they made of me at first, for I was wery shame-faced at startin'. But I got my pluck an' my woice as I went on, and before I'd finished they was quiet enough, and most of 'em looked friendly



when I'd done. Some of 'em came up to thank me, and I'd another talk with *them*. Since then, when I've time, I've gone about of an evening among 'em, trying to git 'em to give up their lushing and save their money, and live decenter, and remember there's a world where there's no sut, and another place where there must be a dreadful lot on it: "an *that* chimbley never gits swep'," I says to them, "becos they never lets the fire out there." Some of 'em cuts up rough, and offers to fight me for a pot, an' the women offen is wery himpident, poor creaturs. I can't say I've done much good, but I've done some, thank God. It seems presumsheous in the likes of me settin' up for a sort o' parson, but it worn't my own thought at start-in', and now you see, sir—knowin' the ways of the trade and so on—I've found out that I can git along with some of 'em, p'r'aps, better than a reg'lar parson could.

He'd know a million times more than me, but then he wouldn't jest know the ways o' sweeps; and so I 'ope you'll excuse me, sir.'

'I ought rather to ask you to excuse me, Mr Craske. I ought to have known you long ago, and the people you visit too. You may be sure, though, that I shall not interfere with you—even if I had the power, or the right, I should not have the will. From what you tell me, I should say that you were just the man to do them good.'

'Oh, sir, I 'ope you don't think I've been crackin' myself up that way. It's jest this. If I hadn't gone amongst 'em, there was no one they could 'ear a good word from. They was like sheep without a shepherd—and precious black sheep, too, hinside as well as out.'

'Just the kind *our* Shepherd came to seek and to save. Try to talk to them as

much like Him as you can, Mr Craske. I mean, don't trust only to *scaring* them. I've no doubt that they need a good deal of scaring. When a man is lying dead drunk in a house on fire, it's a kindness to give him a good shaking. But I have not much faith in mere frightening. If a man only gives up his sins because he is afraid of hell-fire, he is very apt to fall into them again. You know, we don't think much of a man's honesty when it is only the fear of being taken up that keeps him from stealing. Talk to them about the holiness and love of God. I don't mean as if you were preaching them a sermon; but tell them bits out of Jesus's life, just as if you were telling them stories. They will be fresh enough to them, poor fellows, and when they hear them, they will understand what you *mean* by God's holiness and love. Leading is generally better than driving.'

‘I partly see what *you* mean, sir. You think I’ve too much bark, like a young drover’s dog, and so I do more ’arm than good—only drive ’em up into a muddle like.’

‘Indeed, I mean no such thing.’

‘Well, sir, whether you do or whether you don’t, I can see there’s sense in it, and I’ll bear your words in mind.’

In the course of our conversation, I learnt the history of this brother of the cloth.

He thought that Craske was not his right name. His first master’s name was Craske, and he was sure that *he* was not his father. He had no idea who his parents were, or where he was born; but he fancied that it must have been in the country, from a few little things he remembered, and because the first time his master took him into the country, it didn’t seem strange to him.

‘I rec’llect there was a old finger-post in the middle of a bit of green, with a bit of the board broken off, and a moke standin’ under it, and a sow rubbin’ herself agin it, and it all seemed as I’d seen the wery same things the week before, though I know I’d never been out o’ London before, since master had had me. What I remember of the country when I was a kid was what I’ve told you, sir, and a lane with the ‘edges meetin’ almost atop, and a big woman with a red face and a black eye; but I’m sure *she* worn’t my mother from the way I think of her. And then I remember blubberin’ and gittin’ a hidin’ in a little room full of smoke, and a crack in the wall above the mantel-shelf. It worn’t the woman that hidid me—I can remember that; but who it was, I *don’t* remember. And then I rec’llect nothin’ till I was lyin’ atop of the sut-sacks in my master’s shed, feelin’ hawful scared and cold, and blubberin’

becos I'd had another hidin' an' hadn't had nothin' to eat. The tramps used to kidnap country children in them days—boys and gals both—and sell 'em to the sweeps, and I've no doubt that's how it was with me. My master was a Tartar, but I expect he worn't much worse than the rest. He didn't grudge me my grub when I got to be of use, but he was wery fond of hidin' me, with or without a cause. The missis was a bit kinder, but it was heasy to be that, and when she was on the lush, she'd hit out at me with the poker or the rollin'-pin or anythin' else that come to 'and first—sometimes it was the fender—she was noways partic'lar, poor old woman.

'I remember the first time I ever climbed. I must ha' been goin' on for six then, I s'pose; but some was put to it as young as four—yes, sir, little gals as well as boys. My master had two boys as well as me—older than me—and they used to

wallop me, too, and tell me all sorts o' flesh-creepin' stories about the chimbleys—lads stickin' in 'em, and bein' dug out with the flesh all burnt off their bones, and so on. It wasn't pleasant to 'ear sich tales of a night, layin' there in that shed that was as black as pitch. And there was *truth* in them stories, too; though, of course, the t'other boys made 'em out as bad as they could. Anyways, I was hawful scared when master first told me to go up a chimbley. He leathered me, but I caught 'old of his legs, and begged and prayed of him not to force me. But up he shoves me, and when I didn't go on, he set some stror alight in the grate, and that druv me up sharp enough. And then another of the lads was sent up arter me, to give me a prod with a pin when I turned faint-hearted. In the sole of my fut he druv it in, or the fleshy part of my leg—though my legs hadn't much flesh on them in them days.

I was three-parts naked, and my knees and elbers was sore for months arterwards—the sut, you see, got in, and the sores wouldn't 'eal, but I'd to go up all the same. Yes, sometimes the servants pitied me like, but if they give me a penny, my master or his man allus took it.

‘The masters and the journeymen, too, took best part of what we got on May Day. The masters said it was for our clothes, but I don't think my clothing could ha' cost *my* master much. Whenever we got any coppers, if the journeymen couldn't bounce us out of 'em, they'd chisel us out of 'em—at gambling, sir. And then it was the servants who was most set agin the machines. They *would* have the boys. The machines was inwented, bless you, sir, years and years before climbing was put down by Hact o' Parli'ment, and there was climbing boys long arter they was supposed to be put down. The servants said



the new things didn't sweep the flues half as well as the boys did—and there's some truth in that. You see, sir, our scramblin' up an' down rubbed off more sut than a machine will, and then we could git our brushes into 'oles and corners a machine can't reach. But it was a 'orrid life to set a child to.

‘Some folks say that the world's as bad as ever it was, but I can't believe that, or where would ha' been the use of Christ a'-comin' to it, and sufferin' what He did for nothin'? I've no doubt there's improvements, and puttin' down the climbin' was one of 'em. Let alone the boys bein' brought up like little 'eathens, and the life they led, there was all kinds of illnesses they ran the risk on. P'r'aps you may have 'eard, sir, that there's a cancer next to nobody ever had but chimbley-sweepers. It was a 'orrid life. You can git used to most things, and I got used to that, but I never

felt jolly like, 'cept when I was out of a May Day; and there was a dinner use to be given becos a swell kid had been stole for a chimbley-sweep, and his mother found him out becos he'd been sent to a swell place, and crawled into bed, brush and all, jest as if he was used to it. I used to like the tuck-in, but *didn't* I wish sometimes that a swell lady would come along and say, "That's *my* kid—you come 'ome with me, Sam'l."

'Arter I got too big for climbin', I did odd jobs here and there, now for this master and now for that. It was a poor life, and a wicked one too. I'd learnt to drink, and swear, and fight, and gamble, and do all kinds of wickedness, jest as if I'd been a man. I couldn't read then, and I s'pose I'd never been inside a church or chapel in my life. I think, though, that I must ha' been taught to say my prayers, becos, when I was quite a little kid, I used to kneel down by the sut-sacks, and say a bit

of "Our Father"—I didn't know all on it. I'd no clear notion what it meant, but somehow I didn't feel so lonely when I said it. It's wery lonesome for a little kid not to have nobody as belongs to him. I've got a notion that p'r'aps them as was brought up like me, when they gits to know they've a Father in Heaven, vallies Him more than them that has had fathers and mothers to look arter 'em. But I was soon laughed out o' sayin' my prayers, when the t'other lads saw what I was up to, and a real bad boy I turned out.

'When I got a bit older, I'd journeyman's wages. They wasn't much, but then I'd my bed and my board and my perkisits—but it all went the same way. Wuss and wuss I got. A man *must* ha' been a blackguard for sweeps to think him bad, in them days—and I'm afraid things isn't much altered now, so far as that goes—but even amongst my mates I'd a name for

bein' an out-and-outer. *Perkisites?* Oh, that's the money you git for measurin' the sut for your master, and puttin' out chimneys a-fire, and the beer money the servants give you, and such like, sir. It's astonishin' what things people will pride themselves on. I'd got to be wery wentur-some as well as wicked, and I don't know which I was the prouder on. But my pride was to have a fall. I fell into an airey, and a lucky fall it was for me. Instid of tumbling straight into hell, as I expected I should as I shot down, I tumbled into the kingdom of heaven. I'd been carryin' on on a roof, as usual, half drunk, as usual. I was runnin' along a ridge like a rope-dancer when I overbalanced myself, and down I come clatterin' over the tiles. There worn't no prarripet to bring me up, so over I went, as I was tellin' ye. I was a bag of broken bones when they picked me up, and months and months I laid in horse-

spittle. But I was cured at last, and I'd had somebody to see me that had done me more good than all the doctors even.


'There was a kind old lady come to see me, sometimes twice a week. She lived opposite the house I fell off, and she'd seen me tumble. It was her that got me to give up drink, and taught me about Jesus. And she looked arter me, too, when I came out to see that I didn't fall back into bad ways. The kind old lady had me to her house in the evenin', and larnt me my letters. It was then, you see, sir, I got in- to the 'abit of givin' myself a sluice. When I'd saved up a bit of my earnin's, the old lady lent me a little money, and recommended me to her friends; so I bought a machine and a few sticks, and started for myself. As soon's ever I'd saved up the money the old lady had lent me, I took it back to her. I 'oped she'd take it back, but I was 'alf afraid she

wouldn't. But she did, and writ me out a receipt for it, though she never axed for one. "Quite right, my good man," says she, when she'd counted it out. "It would not be a kindness to give you this money, because now you can earn money for yourself, and so I can lend this to some one else to help him to do the same."

'Soon arter that I married my old woman—she was kitchen maid in one of the houses I went to—and neither on us, I 'ope, has had reason to repent it. Sometimes I can keep a man, and sometimes I can't, but we've allus had a livin'.

'Cripps was the name of the lady who give me my start for the next world and this too. I got a suit o' black, and went to the church when she was buried, dear good soul. If I'd ever had a babby—boy or gal—I should ha' called it Cripps, though Cripps. Craske might ha' had a

rummy sort o' sound. She worn't only so good, she was so sensible. Says she to me one day, "What do you do with your soot, Mr Craske?" (*Soot, she* called it, so I s'pose that's right, but in the trade we mostly calls it *sut*). "Well, ma'am," says I, "I sells it to them as sells it agin, but I believe at last the farmers gits it for their corn." "There, Mr Craske," says she, "think of that! The black soot helps to make the beautiful green corn grow, that gives us the sweet white bread. Think of that!" She meant it for a kind of parable like, like them in the Testament, but I didn't twig what she meant at first, so I axed her. "Why," she says, "you mustn't think because you're a chimney-sweep that you can't do any more good to other people than sweeping their chimneys, and paying your debts with the money you get for doing it." Well, sir, I *did* think,



often and often, of what Mrs Cripps had said to me, and that made me the readier to try to do my best when the missionary spoke to me about goin' about among the sweeps.'



## XI.

## IMAGINATIVE MATTHEY.

ONE day when I called upon Mr Jones I found him examining a boxful of still semi-torpid tortoises which he had just bought. It looked a queer consignment, and I expressed my doubts as to its proving a profitable speculation.

‘Never fear, sir,’ said Mr Jones. ‘Have you any idea, sir, o’ ’ow many o’ them queer critturs git sold in London every year? I’ll be bound you hain’t. Well, it’s a good bit nigher twenty thousand than ten, and I hain’t got more than five

dozen. I'll keep a dozen to sell over the counter, and the rest I've got for a friend o' mine as sells 'em in the street. He'll take 'em of me a dozen at a time as he can work 'em off.'

'Why doesn't he buy them where you do, and so save your profit?'

'Bless you, sir, I don't screw a profit out of him. Matthey's a friend of mine, and so I try to 'commodate him a bit. I buy the things of a Jew in the Minories. He gits 'em sent him by his brother as lives in Marocky. They don't cost much for carriage nor for keep, becos they're sound asleep, you see, and so they come as ballast. Well, if Matthey was to go to Cohen for a dozen, he'd charge him, say, five bob; but me buyin' 'alf a gross or so at a time, Cohen 'ill let me 'ave 'em for a trifle less, and then I let Matthey 'ave 'em, as he wants 'em, at cost price.'

'And how do they sell retail?'

‘Well, for those I sells myself I gits prices accordin’ to my customer, and the looks an’ liveliness o’ the queer critturs. At the best o’ times they ain’t never overburdened with spirits. The chaps in the streets, I s’pose, gits from a tanner to a bob a-piece—may’ap ’alf-a-bull for a whopper. There was one chap, I know—anyways he said so—got that for a dead un, becos it was a big un. He gammoned the party that bought it into believin’ that the longer a tortus was in comin’ to life agin, the longer it ’ud live, an’ the livelier it ’ud be, when it did come to life agin.’

‘I hope that wasn’t your friend.’

‘No, that worn’t Matthey. He’d be above cheatin’ like that. Ketch *him* sellin’ a dead thing for a live un! and yet I never come acrost a chap with sich a imagination.’

‘How?’

‘Why, you see, sir, when he’s yarnin’,

you can't believe more than about 'alf o' what he says, and you're puzzled which 'alf to choose. Still, it's interestin' conversation—like a child's story-book, you understand. There ain't no 'arm in Matthey's make-ups, and he tells 'em so nateral that it seems as if there must be truth in 'em some'ow. He goes shell-sellin', too—ever so far into the country, and nice yarns, I'll be bound to say, he spins the yokels about his shells. He's a merry-hearted, amusin' feller, is Matthey.'

'But, Mr Jones, according to your own account, does not your merry-hearted, amusing friend—tell lies?'

'Oh, sir, you don't understand me. Matthey don't tell *mean* lies. When he says he'll do a thing, he does it, and so on. He'll git them tortuses on tick, and the money 'ill be as safe as if it was in my till. But he's as good-natur'd a chap as I know, an' he was born with a imagination,

an' so he can't 'elp spinnin' folks yarns, you see.'

'What does he spin them about?'

'He'll look up at the clouds, an' see all kind o' things in 'em as I can't—he'd make up a 'ist'ry about the coal-scuttle and the fender and the fire-irons. He can't 'elp it, sir. Matthey's lies ain't like other folks', if you must call 'em lies. He don't lie to better hisself. He's a deal too soft-'earted for that. He's often let in—leastways he lets hisself be let in—for though he do spin yarns, he can see through 'em sharp enough. But he's soft-'earted.'

'And so he's taken advantage of, I suppose.'

'Yes, and he gits laughed at when his back's turned. Folks says that his garret's to let empty, but he's got a precious sight more sense in his 'ead than they'd have if they was to live to be Methusilies. It ain't the 'ead, it's the 'art that's soft in

Matthey. But Matthey ain't a cheat—only when he cheats hisself. He don't gammon his customers to get 'em to buy of him, I'll be bound to say that he often takes less than another man would, but it's his good natur' that makes him give the yarns in, you see. The folks that buys of 'im pays no more than if they'd bought from a chap as 'adn't got a imagination, and yet they thinks a deal more of their penn'orth.'

'But, Mr Jones——'

'I won't say it's exactly right—still I can't see that it does much 'arm. When a chap advertises a thing that ain't worth a penny as if it was worth a crown, and gits a crown for it, *that's* cheatin', and no mistake about it. But if a chap don't want to git more than a penny for what other folks sell for a penny, and yet has got the knack of makin' them as buys of him think that it's worth a precious sight more than a crown when they've bought it for a

penny—I s'pose *that's* cheatin' too, but it's a very diff'rent kind o' cheatin' to my thinkin'. He's only took their penny, and yet he's made 'em a present of all their fine fancies. Don't he seem a kind o' vlantrofigist?'

'But, after all, he only makes people happy by making them believe what isn't fact.'

'Well, sir, and—bar sacred matters that don't depend upon your fancy—ain't a good part of what's called 'appiness made up of fancyin' things diff'rent from what they are? You ain't a bumptious man, sir—quite the contrary—sometimes I wish you *would* crow and strut a bit; and yet I'll be bound to say that even you fancy your neighbours think a deal more of you than they do, sir. Perhaps, you wouldn't like to hear all that *is* said about you—no great 'arm, but still not exactly the kind o' thing a man likes to hear said

of hisself. I ain't goin' to tell you, sir, what it is, I'll leave you to be 'appy in your fancy o' yourself. And Matthey gives people that couldn't make up fancies—I don't mean about themselves—most on us can do *that*—but about other things; Matthey gives 'em pretty fancies about the things he sells 'em. I let you keep your pretty opinion, and he gives 'em pretty opinions—that's all the difference, and it ain't much—'cep' that he's cleverer than me. He makes up pretty fancies, and I've let out what I oughtn't to let out, if I wanted to do what I said.'

Mr Jones's casuistry, I certainly could not help thinking, had been by no means complimentary to myself. I was foolish enough to be ruffled. 'Your defence of your merry-hearted, amusing, mendacious friend, Mr Jones,' I remarked, with would-be satirical *hauteur*, 'simply amounts to this—that if he tells clever positive lies,



you try to tell negative lies, but are too clumsy to tell them adroitly. If you told them ever so cleverly, would *your* doing wrong, Mr Jones, *necessarily* be a justification of other people's wrong-doing in the same way?' .

'Don't *you* cut up rough, sir,' cried astonished Mr Jones, struggling hard to smother a grin. 'I like to see you standing up for yourself a bit, and yet some'ows I don't. I meant no 'arm, and won't say any more about the man—'cep' this, that I don't believe he means no 'arm neither, and that you wouldn't think so neither, sir—not if you knew him.'

Just then Matthey happened to come in to inquire about his tortoises. I felt a little prejudiced against him, but his genial face soon dispersed the prejudice as the sun scatters the mist that vainly strives to dim it. He was a brown, black-haired, sailor-like, middle-aged man, with a set of

white teeth that seemed to shed sunlight when he smiled—and that was every other minute.

‘Here’s a gen’leman I’ve been tellin’ about ye, Matthey,’ said Mr Jones. ‘He’s a queer likin’ for good-for-nothin’, idle fellows like you. There, you go into my parlour, and give an account of yourself, and don’t give no more scope to your imagination than you can ’elp, Matthey.’

Matthey grinned back at his friend as he stepped after me into *Rus in Urbe*, where he gave me willingly enough a full and particular account of his life and adventures. I have no reason to doubt that the substance of it was true, and as to the ‘embroidery,’ I began to lapse into Mr Jones’s latitudinarian and exceptionally charitable mode of viewing it, when I found that Matthey only employed it for the amusement of his hearer or the exalta-

tion of somebody else—never to puff or in any way benefit himself.

‘I don’t know what countryman I am, sir,’ said Matthey, still smiling; ‘a penn’orth of all sorts, as the boys say, I fancy. At any rate, I’ve been all over the world, and every place has seemed as strange or as little strange as another. Perhaps I feel most at home when I’m at sea. I was born at sea, I’ve been told, but who my mother or my father was I’ve no more notion than you can have, sir—except that I guess my mother must have been a Catholic, because this belonged to her.’

He showed me a common, coarsely-carved little crucifix, and said that he had worn it as long as he could remember.

‘Are *you* a Roman Catholic?’ I asked.

‘No, sir,—I’m a penn’orth of all sorts. But I’m not a heathen. I like to say my prayers, but it ain’t much odds to me

where I say 'em. God's the Father of everybody, I like to think, so orphans have plenty of brothers and sisters, after all, and I like to say my prayers along with my brothers and sisters wherever I find 'em at it.'

'But how can you have any definite religion if one kind of worship is just the same to you as another?'

'I didn't say that I had any—what did you call it, sir?—definite religion. I've read a little bit—not much—but enough to know that there's all kinds of religions in the world, and that those who believe in one of them ain't very polite, for the most part, to them who believe in the others. But I haven't head enough to puzzle out who's right and who's wrong in the things they wrangle about, and so I agree with 'em all round where *they* agree—and that's in worshipping God.'

'But *how* do you worship Him?'

‘Why, sir, I thank Him for bringing me into a world that’s so full of wonders and goodness. And I ask Him to keep me from doing what’s bad. And when I’ve misbehaved myself, I can’t be happy till I’ve asked Him to forgive me, and promised to try hard not to do so again.’

Professional feeling prompted me to continue to urge that Matthey—who was so outrageously catholic as not even to be a Dissenter—must be in a very unsatisfactory condition. But conscience whispered to me—“‘Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’—are *you* half, or a quarter, as child-like in your conceptions of your relation to your Heavenly Father as Matthey is?’ That whisper changed the confident sermon I was prepared to utter into the following remark,—

‘But you have said nothing about Jesus Christ, Matthew?’

‘I’ve worn him as long as I can remember, sir,’ said Matthey, producing his crucifix.

‘Ah, but that is only superstitious reverence, Matthew.’

‘Whatever it is, sir, I can’t see the harm of it. This bit o’ bone has often made me think about Jesus when it was a comfort to me to have Him to think of; and it’s the only kind of evidence like that I ever had a mother. That’s another reason why I like it. The woman that brought me up told me that she’d heard say that my mother put it round my neck when she was dyin’, and though the good old woman wasn’t a Catholic, she always made me wear it as a sort of charm, and so I got used to wear it, and after all it *has* been a sort o’ charm. A thing that makes you think of Jesus and your mother at the same time, in a ship’s fo’c’s’le or when you’re ashore with your wages burning a

hole in your pocket, can't be such a bad thing for a young chap, sir.'

To hear Matthey's talk, however, one might have imagined that he had very rarely come in contact with any one likely to do him harm. The people of almost perfect excellence, of both sexes and all ages, whom he had encountered all over the world, he gratefully commemorated in a catalogue of almost wearisome length. If I felt somewhat sceptical as to the possibility of any man's having met with so many models of behaviour, however wide his wanderings might have been, I could not doubt, nevertheless, that Matthey must be a sweet-blooded fellow, or he would not have fancied that he had met with them. Our estimate of the objective of all kinds is dyed in the colours of our subjectivity.

'The eye sees all around in gloom or glow,  
Hues of its own, fresh borrowed from the heart.'

The kindness of the old woman just

mentioned Matthey was constantly commemorating; but he said nothing of *his* kindness to *her*.

Putting together what he told me, and what Mr Jones had gathered from other sources of his history, I learnt that Matthey had been born on board a vessel bound from Bahia to London; that his mother had died and been buried at sea about three weeks before the vessel was moored in the Import oblong of the West India Docks; that a sailor whose Christian name was Matthew had been very kind to the orphaned child of the poor 'furrin woman,' and that he was washed off the bowsprit whilst stowing the jib as the ship was coming up Channel; that the young wife of this Matthew had come to the docks to look after her husband, and finding herself a childless widow, had taken possession of the seaborne child to whom her husband had been kind, and who had no one else



to claim him; that she had given him her husband's name, and brought him up as if he had been her own child; and that in return Matthey had behaved like a son to her, and when she grew too feeble to work, had supported her entirely out of his wages and earnings. A year or two before her death he had given up the sea in order that he might be oftener with her, and taken to the calling he was following when I made his acquaintance; 'and since the poor old lady's been gone,' said Mr Jones, 'Matthey ain't a penny-piece the richer. He's got used to live on a little, he says, whatever he arns. Money ain't no use to him, he says. A precious little I fancy it is he lives on sometimes. He doesn't do badly I've heard from them he buys his shells of, and he's as safe as the Bank to trust. He'll pay every penny he owes first thing, so it's easy for him to git credit now. But if he didn't 'ave to git credit he'd do better, and

he might easy do without it, if he didn't give an' lend—same thing where Matthey's concerned—sich a sight away. It's all right that he should have been kind to the old gal as was so kind to him; though from what I can make out, she wasn't quite the angel Matthey makes out, and I'll be bound to say he never cost her much—he's sich a smart, self-reliant chap, for all his imagination, that I'll be bound to say he arned his livin' pretty nigh as soon as he could run alone.'

'Isn't that a little bit of imagination on your part?' I asked with a smile.


'Well, p'r'aps 'tis, sir,' answered Mr Jones, laughing back; 'though you know I ain't given to that kind of thing. It's a queer thing, is a imagination. Matthey's fair puzzles me. He'd 'ave more money if he 'adn't got it, but then I doubt whether he'd be 'alf as 'appy. I know some of the folks that 'as got 'old of him now, an' I

can pretty well guess what the t'others is like. A nice lot they are!—and a sharp chap like Matthey must see it for hisself when his imagination ain't turned full on. But Matthey won't 'ear a word agin 'em. Bless you, he gets a'most angry when I tries to warn him like. “What's the good of your trying to spoil my notions of folk?” he says. “I ain't goin' to let 'em be spoilt. Where's the good of it? Who'd be the better for it?” he says; an' I'm 'alf-inclined to think Matthey's right. Any'ow he's al'ays so cheery that I orfen wish I could borry his eyes, or his way o' lookin' at things, or whatever it is. But it's too late in life for me to begin to grow a imagination. I expect it's a thing, too, that can't exactly be growed—it must spring up in ye nateral like at the begining like the primroses.'

‘It's never too late to begin to cultivate one part of Matthey's “imagination”—

the charity that suffereth long and is kind,  
and thinketh no evil.'

'That's true, sir, and I try 'ard to do my best that way—though bad's the best, I'll own, for I'm a cross-grained old hunk, I know. But still, if you'll excuse me, sir, I don't think you're speakin' quite to your text. When you can't 'elp seein' that a feller's a rogue, where's the charity to him or anybody else in makin' believe that you don't? If somebody don't call him by his right name, he may cheat his self at last in a different way to Matthey's, who's as modest a man as I know, and git to fancy that he's a honest man, or else that everybody is rogues, and so it don't matter. You may look over the wrong he's done *you*—though that's 'ard, an' I can't feel some'ow that it's quite right so far as him and you are concerned, when you've done nothing to provoke it from *him*—but if you let him off when he hurts



you, ain't you encouragin' him to go on hurtin' other people—and is that charity, I ask you again, sir, either to him or the t'others? But there, we're gittin' into a argeyment, and that's what you and me don't like to 'ave together, do we, sir?'

Mr Jones's face reflected the smile with which I greeted this reminder of old times.

'I know what you mean, sir,' he said. 'You think I like to 'ave it all my own way—but I ain't so bad as that now, thank God. I should be in a poor way, if I was—I know that every day of my life. You leave me to think it out. *I* was talkin' about imagination, an' Matthey's seems to make him see everything and everybody through stained glass like. As I said before, that's a puzzle to me. Mayhap he wouldn't like the things 'alf so well if he saw them as they is, as they seems to folks that 'asn't got a imagination; but that puzzles me agin. He believes in

what he sees as much as me in what I sees—and he ain't a fool. Who's to decide what's what? Imagination seems a nice kind o' thing to 'ave, if you want to be cosy, but who's right—the chaps as 'ave a imagination, or the chaps as 'asn't?'

'The Noes would have it—if you could put it to the vote, Mr Jones. But I don't think they would be right, though I don't profess to have more of an "imagination" than you do. People of "imagination," as you call them, I think, don't see through stained glass, but through lenses. They don't see what *isn't* in the things they look at, but more of what *is* in them than people who have no "imagination" do; and then fortunately they can't keep in what they see, but somehow are forced to tell other people what they've seen, and have the knack of making other people like you and me see partly as they see. I dare say they have a little bit of conceited

pleasure in being able to see what other people can't, and yet being able to make the others see it, after a fashion, when *they* have seen it; but I don't think that counts for much with them. They talk, and paint, and write, and sing, just because they must, and feel grateful to God because they must; and you and I and thousands of other people who have eyes to see and ears to hear, though we mayn't have much of an "imagination," ought to be very grateful to those who have, and more especially grateful to the God who has given it to them, and so given it at fresh second-hand to us.'

'Seems to me, sir, that you've got some kind of a imagination yourself,' was Mr Jones's not altogether complimentary comment on my outburst of æsthetical commonplaces. Having been prepared for Matthey's 'imagination,' I was not astonished to find his account of the voy-

ages he had made and the places he had visited very different from the bald chronicles of their adventures one generally gets from sailors. A dry geographical primer is more interesting, contains more local colour, than most sailors' accounts of 'foreign parts.' Matthey, on the other hand, had discovered wonders everywhere. Perhaps he had invented some of the marvels he related ; but if so, his good faith in relating them was plainly unimpeachable. If he had not seen the things of which he told, he had fancied that he did see them at the time, or come to fancy afterwards that he had seen them. Of course, he had seen the sea-serpent. 'We were coming from Australia round the Horn, and the sun—such a sun as you gets in winter in those latitudes—and the moon and the stars were all in the sky at the same time. The sun soon went down, and the moon came out pretty brightish, and there on




the weather-bow I saw the serpent as plain as I see you, sir, wriggling along towards us. As near as I could guess, it was about ninety fathom long—a dark, slimy thing, with a great spot o’ light here and there all about it, as if it had got eyes on its back and its belly from head to tail. But if they were eyes, it didn’t make much use of them. Every time its head came up above a wave—it was shaggy just like a lion’s—it moved about this side and that, as you’ve seen a caterpillar do, and then down on the ship it steered again. I was terribly scared; for if the sea-serpent once gets hold of a ship, it climbs up the mast, crunching all the spars, and then down it drags you. But after all the serpent missed its distance, and went by a cable length astern of us. I could see it wriggling in a rage, and trying to “bout ship” and come after us; but there was too much of a sea on to let it.’

I ventured to inquire whether the so-called serpent might not possibly have been a huge mass of floating sea-weed.

‘Sea-weed, sir!’ answered Matthey. ‘I ought to know sea-weed—been at sea all my life almost. No, sir: that was a sea-serpent, and very serious, I can assure you, I felt till I’d watched it out of sight rising and falling in the moonlight, as it slanted off s’uth’ards on that cold, lonely sea.’


If all Matthey’s fancies had been of this fashion, Mr Jones would have had small reason for thinking ‘a imagination’ a ‘cosy’ thing to possess; but Matthey had seen far pleasanter visions, and dreamt far more agreeable dreams. Shells were his favourite subjects. He made up all kinds of quaint individual biographies about their vanished owners. From a boy he had been a collector of shells, selling



them to the dealers' buyers who board homeward-bound vessels.

'When a shell's a curiosity, they can get pounds and pounds for it, though it mayn't be as big as a bean, and so they keep a sharp look-out. Off Deal sometimes their men will come aboard, and they send men out all over the world after shells. The common sorts they buy by the hundred weight. There's a good market at home, and foreigners come over to England to buy, and then go back and hawk them just as I do. A shell's always a beauty. When it was let, it brightened up the sea; and when it's empty, it's bought for fancy work, or to put on the mantel-piece, or on your door-steps, or a window-ledge, or in a grotto, or a rockery, or round your garden, and so on. When I see those conchs in the gardens out round by London, half choked with dust when a

bitter east wind is blowing, I can't help pitying them. It's a queer change from the places I've seen them lying in abroad. And yet I like to see a shell in a house or a garden. It's like getting a whiff of the sea. Country people are very fond of shells. I mostly buy the common sorts that I can sell for a penny each, and work down, say as far as Devizes, in and out among the villages, and so on, both sides of the road. Some of the folks that buy of me you might think hadn't a penny to spare in the world; but they'll buy a shell or two, and put them up to their ears—the old men as pleased as the youngsters—to hear the sea moaning inside. That's a strange sound to hear where nobody but yourself has ever seen the sea, and the people and the cattle and the crops and everything seem nodding off to sleep. But the country people brighten up when I tell them where I've been, and what I've seen,



and all I know about the shells, and so on. Often they'll make me stop and have a bit of something to eat and drink.'

'Do you tell them about the sea-serpent, Matthew?'

'Yes, sir,' he answered, with a smile; 'and *they* believe me. Living in the open air, I fancy, gives a man more faith. Country folks and sailors, I've noticed, are readier to believe in God's wonders than town's folk are. The smoke and the brick seem to choke and cramp their belief in anything they haven't seen for themselves.'

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